

Through
Twists
& Turns

HE IS FAITHFUL

Brenda Loudon

Through Twists & Turns: He is Faithful

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Many thanks to my precious “grand” artists:

Melody: pages 18, 20, 41, 51, 55, 73, 83, 85

Jesse: pages 35, 59, 65, 89, 93

Joshua: page 57

Dawson: page 101

Briana: page 87

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Unless otherwise attributed, all scripture is quoted from the New King James Bible

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Foreword

Brenda and I have travelled together on the path of life, jointly seeking His Kingdom, to which we aspire to gain the prize. This vision has been planted by the Holy Spirit deep into our being, and continues to capture us all these years.

For this path the Lord has provided me a helpmeet of steadfast disposition, to make easier much of what the Lord has wrought into us. I am so grateful for your part in this, and deeply express my thankfulness to you. Many years of labor with children, cooking, and cleaning up after me and our boys, entertaining saints, and bearing with the burden in my spirit regarding the Church.

After 50 years together we find ourselves at a major milestone in human life which many will not see. Arriving at this mark, I place much of the possibility at the feet of the Lord, and you. The list of sacrifices, and pressing through by you has made possible that which would otherwise be impossible for me.

I deeply love you, and desire to spend more times together in the remaining years ahead of us. So much of eternity remains a mystery, but I hope we are together in some fashion...experiencing the fullness of all we have fellowshiped about over these earthly years.

I am so grateful for you. I love you!

Dave

Introduction

During 2020 and 2021 the Lord impressed me with many illustrations from our life and from His Word. It has been my desire to attempt writing them in a way which would encourage, bless and challenge loved ones. For more than 50 years the Lord Jesus has continued to call me into an ever deepening walk with Him. I can truly say this relationship has been the anchor and strength of my life. He has given me an increasingly eternal view...a vision which I see to be worth obedience to anything He would ask.

As a teenager I had no idea of the destiny my heavenly Father had in mind for all believers. Even when He revealed it, sadly I resisted many times. How thankful I am He has never lifted His hand from me...even when I've been disobedient.

May you who read this find Him faithful and purposeful in your life, even when He allows grievous trials.

With much love,

— Brenda, Mom, G'ma

April 2022





1. Overwhelmed or Ruling Over?

Spring time finally! Who appreciates it more than people who live in winter for about seven months each year? And yet magically, amazingly as the weather warms and the sun's rays become more direct, the grass transforms to a deep green and yes, the dandelions spread their carpet of yellow flowers.

Dandelions—a menace or a potential medicine awaiting discovery? The jury may still be out on that. My husband mows them down with a vengeance; hoping (rather futilely) to prevent the dreaded seeds from multiplying. Down they go, but voila!—the very next day, up they come, lifting new blossoms to the sun. Pushing my shovel deep into the ground to discover and discard the rope like roots of quack grass also appears to be a losing battle, for very soon up pokes yet another green blade!

I am reminded this morning that weeds are also something we find in our hearts—weeds with stubborn, reoccurring roots. Weeds which desire to bloom. God warns us in Proverbs 4:23 “Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it flow the issues of life.” Guard, watch over, keep the garden which grows within you. Why such a warning? Because just as the bias of nature is toward making all our gardening efforts a wilderness; just as the wild pushes to take back the territory

gained by careful weeding, something similar can happen to our hearts. There are hidden roots to be carefully, diligently ruled over.

God's children were told to enter and take over the good land of Canaan. It was to be their inheritance, but you will notice there were battles involved—constant battles. Victories were won when His people obeyed His instructions and victories were lost when they didn't. We have the *same challenges* today in our individual lives. We have the *same promises* today as well. Let's encourage one another to take Mary's advice, "Whatever HE tells you to do, do it." As we listen to and obey HIS speaking, the weeds in our heart will not overwhelm us. We will rule over them, and enjoy blossoms which produce fruitfulness that bring glory to Him.

When we stand before our Lord Jesus one day the fruit borne from our hearts will truly be all that really matters.

2. Vision in the Common

Quotes from “Next Door Neighbor” by Max Lucado

“You awoke to a common day. But that’s OK; there’s nothing special about the day. It’s not your birthday or Christmas; it’s like every other day. A common day.”

“If you’re home with the children, it’s simply more meals to prepare, laundry and cleaning to do, diapers to change. It all seems so mundane. You are a common person. You lead a common life. Punctuated by occasional weddings, graduations, birthday celebrations—a few highlights—but mainly the day to day rhythm that you share with the majority of humanity.”

“You need to know how to succeed at being *common*. *Commonhood* has its perils, you know... you can feel insignificant. Do commoners rate in the next life? Does God love common people? He answers these questions in a most uncommon fashion. If the word common describes you, take heart—you’re in fine company. It also describes Christ.”

“Christ common? Since when is walking on water common? Speaking to the dead—being raised from the dead? But those were only the last 3 years of His life. Nine tenths of it was common. A single-camel town: Nazareth, a dot on the edge of boredom. For thirty of his thirty three years, Jesus lived a *common* life. Aside from the incident in the temple at age 12 we have no record of what he said or did for 30 years. All we hear from Mark 6:3 is, “Is this not the carpenter?”

Let’s learn to listen to such simple details, for God can speak through uneventful daily trivia. Apparently in the quiet early years of our Lord, He did, for consider the number of parables he told: a splinter

in someone's eye, a yoke of oxen, a red sky at night, or a farmer sowing seeds to name just a few.

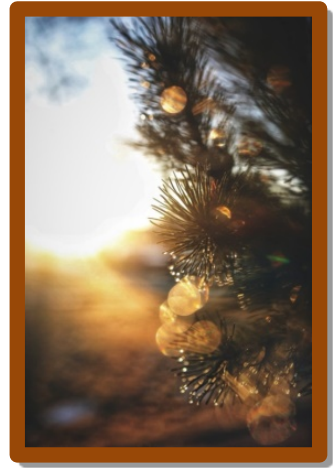
"The next time your life feels ordinary take your cue from Christ. Pay attention to your work and your world. Jesus began His obedience in a small town carpentry shop. His uncommon approach to His common life groomed him for his uncommon call."

Dear ones, we also are being groomed in this life with assignments He is giving us. Actually, are not all the little, common things surrounding us each day some of those? I'm sure they are! It is possible that we may live out our whole life and have no obvious "great exploits" for the Lord. A verse which spoke to my heart about this is the question asked: "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10) Many, many times I have missed the significance of the daily, the mundane, the small things. Let's ask our *everywhere-present* Lord to open our eyes to see Him who is "intimately acquainted with all our ways."

"Lord, impact my heart with the vision to see You throughout each day, knowing I can sow to the Spirit in the common things."

3. Things are Not Always as They Seem

When looking at this picture it may be difficult to perceive what those larger pale yellow balls are. The truth is, they are the same dew drops you see on the pine needles, but while displaying the refractive rays of the sun, their appearance is changed



Consider the account of Joseph. Early in his life God gave this privileged young man two amazing dreams—ones which indicated he would one day be in a place of authority; even over his family. Has God ever given you a vision of something glorious in your future? I think as followers of Christ we may all have considered something like that. There are amazing promises in God’s Word about “reigning with Christ.” But that is not just in the distant future; what about the here and now?

Put yourself in Joseph’s place. After being attacked by his brothers he was sold as a slave and taken to Egypt. Even worse, after doing the right thing there, he was falsely accused and put into a dungeon. Where was his vision now? Where is ours when *our good dreams* are smashed? The high school graduation doesn’t happen; the great career doesn’t satisfy; the marriage is a disappointment (or doesn’t happen at all); we have more children than we planned, or perhaps not even one. You get the idea...there are bumps along life’s road. Bumps which look like vague yellow balls but definitely not so pretty.

There’s a verse which says, “If we endure, we will reign with Him.” (2 Timothy 2:12) To endure is to *remain firm under suffering*; to

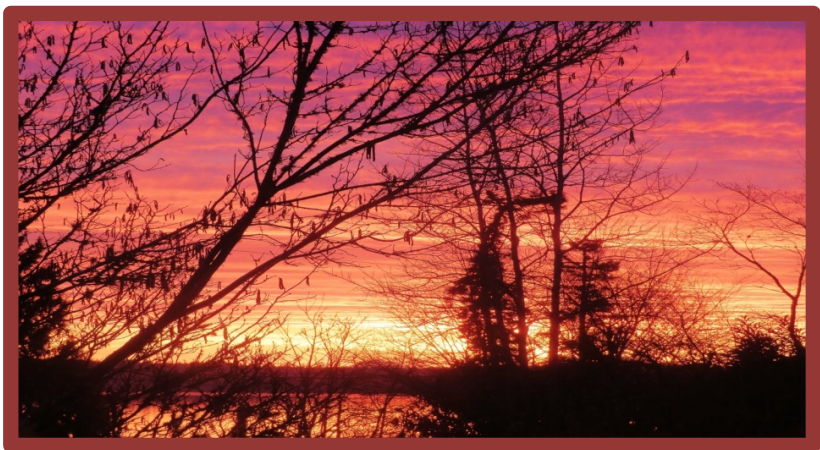
undergo *without giving in*. Do we not need a vision in order to do this?

To reign is to possess or exercise sovereign power; to exercise authority.

In Joseph's case we know the end of the story. His vision from God did come to pass. We aren't given a lot of details about his feelings throughout the trials but I'm sure, like us, he would have had many discouraging days. The point is, he did not give up! He learned to endure; likely reminding himself of what he knew to be true, even when things were not as they seemed. He exercised some authority, at least over himself in that way.

And...at the appointed time, God absolutely came through. Joseph did reign!

Let us not give up as we walk through trials, for they will come. Our Father is giving us opportunities and perhaps one day we will declare as Joseph did, "God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day..." (Genesis 50:20)



4. Look to Him and Live

Zechariah, a prophet of the Lord was raised up to encourage God's people, returning after seventy years of Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. They faced overwhelming ruins as well as much opposition from some who lived around them.

Can we not relate to such negative circumstances and voices today?—some of them powerful and very against God.

I was reminded of a picture of a glorious sunset and realized it would not have been so beautiful if the clouds had not been there. Is that not God's intention?—to manifest even more of His glory, through the obstacles of storm clouds in our lives.

How did Zechariah find encouragement and strength to speak life-giving words to his fellow believers? I noticed the following sentence repeated four times among his prophecies.

"I raised my eyes and looked." (Zechariah 1:18, 2:1, 5:1, 6:1) This dear prophet lifted up his gaze and saw amazing things from another realm. He was greatly strengthened in his faith by seeing and hearing what God had to say.

Because of the Bible we believers can do the same today. We can feast on those words and in that way direct the “eyes of our heart” to eternal truths—even in the face of much opposition. And...remember what Jesus said, He will return with a *cloud*. Perhaps in our lives today, this cloud we are facing will also bring us a greater vision and experience of our Lord.

Let’s encourage one another to look to Him and live.



5. Rivers From Clouds

Quote from “Prevailing Intercessory Prayer” by J. Gregory Mantle (1853-1925), pastor, prolific author, and orator for God

“There is a fine old mountain...for ages drinking from every cloud that has settled upon *his* head, until *he* has become a great reservoir, and from *him* today there flow five rivers. If we drink from the invisible and the Eternal, there will flow from us rivers of blessing, fertilizing, gladdening and blessing all around. But if we fail to hold communion with the skies, we shall be guilty of the mockery which holds an empty vessel to the lips of a thirsty man.”

I love that picture!—one of countless others our Father reveals if we have eyes to see. Like that mountain, we can drink in the Lord’s life each day, and allow His truths to saturate our hearts. Remember what Jesus said in John 7:37, 38?

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink...out of his heart [innermost being] will flow rivers of living water.”

As we draw His life-giving words into our hearts, our words and actions will then flow blessings and life to those around us. As surely as the rivers from that mountain spread nourishing water wherever they flow, in like manner so will we.

Dear ones, in this way, little by little and day by day as we drink, the Kingdom of God is being brought to others through us. One day there will be the “tipping point,” and He, our Saviour, upon similar clouds will suddenly appear.



6. Skylight on our Way

Perhaps some of you have noticed the beautiful sunsets lately. Take a good look at this picture and consider how the heavens are boldly declaring the glory of God; our amazing Creator.

Take some time to study the light of the setting sun reflected on the railroad and let it remind you of a number of verses in the Bible. Oh to see so clearly the presence of our heavenly Father around us, for the Bible declares “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.” (Psalm 34:15)

Not only are His eyes on us, but He promises to *light up the path for our feet*, and lead us in a *plain path*—such that even the crooked places will be made straight—much like the railroad in this picture.

We have His promise repeated a number of times. One is found in Isaiah 42:16 where, under inspiration of the Spirit of God he writes, “I will lead them in paths...and I will make crooked places straight”

King David also wrote, asking for such help, “Lead me in a *straight path...*” (Psalm 27:11) Other versions say, “smooth, level, plain, and good path.

We also have the promise John wrote, “If we *walk in the light* as HE is...we have fellowship with one another.” (John 1:7)

Dear ones, we can trust Him. He is so faithfully caring for us in each tiny detail of our lives. Our path may not appear as clear as the railroad but we do have the promise of His leading—even if it is simply “step by step.”

Walking with our Shepherd does light up our way.

7. God Inhabits Praise

“... *look at the things which are...not seen...
the things which are eternal.*”
(2 Corinthians 4:18)

The other day about noon I experienced a heightening sense of anxiety and oppression—not a new feeling to me. I liken those episodes to a “soul eating attack” from the dark side. Too many times in the past I have wallowed in those feelings, thinking myself to be helpless, but this time was to prove different.

Realizing in a fresh way that the antidote for those assaults is to come to the Lord Jesus, I began to spend time thanking our heavenly Father for unseen, eternal things. His throne is unseen to us now but He declares it to be there; our God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is unseen but oh how real! He is all powerful; has all authority in heaven and on earth; is all knowing and present everywhere yet we know this only by faith at this point in our lives. We, in our spirit, are sitting together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and we are His temple. His very overcoming life is living in us.

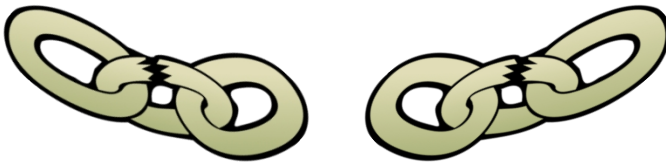
As I continued to thank Him for all this and more, oh how much lighter my heart became; the oppression fled, and from that position in Christ I was able to intercede for loved ones He had put on my heart. What a lesson to continue learning and applying! Often my habit is to quickly run to our Lord with all my anxiety, but praising Him first for all the unseen truths He brought to my mind lifted me out of darkness and brought my heart into greater freedom.

Looking back on that day this verse came to my mind, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” (2 Corinthians 2:11) In Greek, the word for *devices* could be translated as *thoughts*. We know the devil is able to shoot “fiery darts” into us. Could those *darts* involve *thoughts*? Yes! Many times

thoughts or feelings have come to us and we believe them to be our own—but they are not! They are “noema” (devices) he is using to cause us distress or distraction from our Lord. Oh, how we as believers need to be rescued from our ignorance of his devices.

If we aren’t sure why the negative thoughts and feelings are coming we can still begin to praise the Lord; to declare His truths, and experience His glorious freedom as I did that day.

As one gospel song says, “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed Thee.”



8. Untangling and Pushing Through



“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

It was time to put up the racoon fence. This is a *three strand* affair which runs the whole circumference of our corn field. When in place, the metal wire woven into each strand will be attached to batteries capable of giving an excellent deterring jolt to any hungry racoon—the only way we have found to effectively keep them from ravaging our crop.

Prep time for two aging grandparents would have taken a whole day, but with helpful grandchildren it became half of that. The lion’s share of the tedious job involved untangling huge knots from the previous year’s fence which had fallen into disrepair; and again as ‘*three*’ of us persevered, what looked impossible to one person alone now became ‘do-able!’ Little by little each strand was put into place, checked for a good connection, then tightened so an electrical current could run unhindered through each of the *three* levels.

What a picture of God’s work in our daily life. In His wisdom He desires believers to work together so we are not overpowered by our enemy. Three cords, three strands, three working together and we can overcome. Any obstacle hindering God’s divine current can be untangled with Him strengthening us—and we will then withstand predators which may attack our soul.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7)

Our oldest grandson was getting married and I desperately needed a new dress. With encouragement from my husband this rather “un-techy” Grandma actually discovered and ordered one *online*. I guess you could say I *pushed through* something which greatly challenged me—and excitement was building as I waited for my purchase to arrive! However, after opening the parcel and trying the dress on I realized the style was completely unsuitable. What was I to do? Time was running out.

Perhaps I could find a lovely, barely used dress in a thrift store—but after checking several places—no success. Attractive, summery dresses with higher neck lines and partial length sleeves are rare. Returning home without victory, I then asked the Lord about this desire in my heart. Following that, it came to my mind, *Search out a different mall*. My husband graciously offered to help me seek. In the second store checked I found something suitable and...even more pleasing to my thrifty Scottish blood it was 70% off! Content with that, we were walking away when yet another dress shop came across our path. This time, rather exhausted from my day of seeking it was my helper husband who said, “Maybe you should take a look here too. Push through your feelings.” I reluctantly agreed—and precisely as we entered that place the sales ladies announced, “50% off on all clothing!” Thirty minutes later I left with another lovely dress.

The Lord graciously warmed my heart, but I did have to follow through my asking, by “seeking and knocking”—past my comfort zone. What a lesson in life—whether *knots* or *needs*, let’s encourage one another to push through for victory.

9. A Shattered Dream

Recently I've been musing about King Saul's daughter, Michal who married David. When her father heard that his daughter loved the young hero, he was pleased because he could possibly use her as a snare to cause David's death. We are told that when given the challenge to kill 100 Philistines to win her hand, it "...pleased David to become son-in-law to the King." Instead of being killed by them as the king had hoped, David succeeded, and was given his bride.

We aren't told how long the princess enjoyed her new life as "Mrs. David," but it is quite certain Michal was very pleased with her new role. The young woman's dreams had come true so far: she had been given to the man she loved. She continued her privileged position as a princess, with all her material needs lavishly met. However—her world was about to come crashing down.

In 1 Samuel 19 Michal was informed that her father was sending his men to kill David! In a panic, she helped him escape via a window, then put some kind of image in the bed, to resemble a sleeping man. When soldiers arrived at her door and demanded David come with them, she lied by saying, "He is sick." (thus buying him time to get farther away.)

When her father queried her the next morning, she lied again—possibly to save her life. Perhaps she had witnessed Saul's murderous unbalanced mind on previous occasions, and was afraid of him. Would he have her killed now? No, but to shame his son-in-law, the king—with no regard for Michal's feelings—sent her off to marry another man, and it would be years before she would see David again. Michal was selfishly used merely as a pawn by a father who had made many evil choices in his life. She now lost her privileged position—and her life with the man she loved.

Many of us can relate to a father or other authority who grievously failed to properly care for us—someone who may have caused us a great deal of pain. Have we gotten bitter and hard—or just shut down?

Jesus taught us to pray, “Father, *forgive us as we forgive* those who have *trespassed, sinned against* us.” The Lord has come to give us the ability to do that; and as we do, we experience the forgiveness from Him which we each need.

May this be our earnest prayer: “Lord Jesus, I come to You for the grace to forgive any who have sinned against me.”

Would Michal choose to forgive that one who was the cause of so much of her suffering and shattered dreams?—the one who should have loved and protected her? (Keep reading to find out.)



10. Bitterness or Humility

After Saul was killed and David's Kingdom was finally established, he then ordered Michal's removal from the home of the man to whom she had been given. She who had been raised as a privileged princess was now taken from a man who apparently deeply desired her to remain, for he "followed her, openly weeping." (2 Samuel 3:13-16)

What was going on in Michal's heart now?

Was she hoping her relationship with David would be restored to what it had previously been? We are not told. But this time she would have to share him with at least SIX other wives! Did David even love her, or was he simply taking back what *belonged* to him? How helpless and misused did she feel over circumstances out of her control? This was certainly not the happy life she had planned. Would there be a second chance for joy, even though circumstances had so drastically changed?

Several years went by when we are told in 2 Samuel 6 about David's exuberant dancing, whirling and playing music before the Lord when the ark was returned to Jerusalem. 1 Chronicles 15:29 says, "Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window... and *despised him in her heart*;" then deeply offended, she came out of the home to rebuke her husband for his lack of regal decorum while worshipping.

The result? She remained childless.

What would Michal's outcome have been if she had chosen to humble herself in her present surroundings? Could she have, with humility left her regal status to join her husband in rejoicing before the Lord?

How do we respond when given a second chance to "leave the things behind and press forward?"—even when legitimate dreams go

unfulfilled. Are we willing to come to the Lord Jesus and ask for His heart of forgiveness and humility?

Our husband may not be guilty of sexual unfaithfulness as David was, but perhaps he has other ‘loves’—things which cause us to feel unloved and neglected. They may even be spiritual pursuits which leave us feeling like a “back burner” to something with which we can never compete.

With these questions we can all relate to Michal, a king’s daughter who had every right to be angry. Sadly, it seemed she was not willing to forgive or to press forward; and the Bible says, “she bore no children.” On a spiritual plane one may say her life was fruitless.

I truly believe we will not finish as she did if we’re willing to do three things: *humble ourselves, forgive others, and rejoice by trusting in the Lord* who does love us perfectly.

“Lord, we ask You to work in us that we would do this and bear much fruit for You.”



11. Freedom All Day Long

Quotes from Frank Laubach (1884-1970) —known as “the apostle to the illiterate.”

“While a daily devotional time is vital for saturating our minds with Christ, it is not enough. All during the day, in the *chinks of time* between the things we find ourselves obliged to do, there are moments when our minds ask: “*What next?*” Ask Him: “*Lord, think Your thoughts in my mind. What is on Your mind for me to do now?*” When we ask like that we tune in and give Him a chance to pour His ideas through our imagination. It is possible for everybody everywhere, even if surrounded by people. We can continue to talk silently with our invisible Friend. We need not close our eyes nor change our position nor move our lips.

Romans 8:23 tells us that we who have the Spirit experience a *groaning within*; a desire for God’s Kingdom to come to this earth, and for His will to be done. This may create in our hearts a great pain; a great discontent for the blindness all around us. Let us not quench that sense, but bring it in prayer to the One Who is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

In this way we can learn to live in the Spirit of prayer!”

Have you ever watched the story of “A Woman Called Moses” with Cicely Tyson? Recently I did and was hugely impacted! It’s about Harriet Tubman—one born into harsh bondage in the slave state of Maryland. This young woman had a burning desire to be free—like a calling on her life—and perhaps it was. With the help of the “Underground Railway” she finally arrived in Philadelphia and gained her freedom. But Harriet was not satisfied to experience liberty only for herself! Fighting that others might gain it as well, she made at least 13 additional grueling trips to the plantations and led more than 300 others to freedom—at great danger to herself.

Recently while praying for loved ones with a sister in Christ over the phone I realized in a fresh way—the only way to really help those in bondage around us is this: purpose first to press through into freedom ourselves! Jesus in John 8: 31, 32 said, “If you *abide in My Word*... You shall know the truth and the *truth shall make you free*,” And in verse 36 “... *the Son makes you free*, you shall be free indeed.” (Amplified version adds: “unquestionably free.”) This is true—even before we *feel* it to be so.

Is the passion Harriet felt a reflection of our own heart to experience freedom?—in our case not from *human* but *spiritual* enemies. There are so many all around us still in bondage to harsh taskmasters; “principalities” who have infiltrated their minds with lies.

What then? Will we stand fast in our freedom in order to be used to help others? We are exhorted in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again in a yoke of bondage.”

Dear ones, let’s encourage one another, and pray often for one another to walk in this marvellous freedom—so the Divine life can more freely flow through us to bring others around us out of bondage all day long.

12. Ditches

When our Lord said, “*Narrow* the road that leads to life, and only a few find it;” what did He mean? (Matthew 7:14) Some versions call it a *constricted* or *difficult* way which leads to life.

Psalm 27:11 says, “Lead me in a *plain [smooth, straight] path* because of my *enemies*.” So in addition to being *narrow*, perhaps even constricted, there are *enemies* as well.

But this road is leading to something wonderful—something our Lord refers to as *life*: “*Zoe-divine life!*”—a foretaste of His Kingdom while we live on this earth. This is a vision worth pursuing; worth running for with endurance.

Since there are enemies to this narrow way, perhaps they would carve out a distracting ditch on either side. What might those look like?

How about the rather recent preaching that goes something like this: “It doesn’t matter how you live as a Christian because God is crazy about you. You don’t need to fear His discipline.” Really?! Is that what the New Testament teaches?

The Church in Acts did fear God. They knew there were consequences to disobedience. Just check out the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Consider the fate of the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was “delivered to Satan” for his continued immorality. There is also the mention of loss of reward at the *judgment* seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5. Yes, our heavenly Father does love us perfectly—enough to train, to discipline, and to allow consequences for our learning and maturing in our faith. Oh, how we need to encourage one another. It’s so easy to fall into a ditch, but praise the Lord, He is willing and able to call us back to His life—that wonderful taste of Him on the narrow way!

There is another ditch along the narrow way. Some whom I dearly love are being distracted by that one. Even though Jesus said, “I came to fulfill [complete] the law,” (Matthew 5:17) some today teach believers to focus on and keep all the Old Covenant commandments. This would nullify the Scripture in Hebrews 8 which repeats the promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34, “I will make *a new covenant...not according to the covenant* I made with their fathers...I will put My laws in their mind...and on their hearts. In that He says, ‘*a new covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete.” (Hebrews 8:7-13)

This is not to say we can’t enjoy the rich symbolism of the Old Testament feasts. Each detail of the temple with its sacrifices is a picture of some aspect of our Saviour. We can be blessed with understanding more of Christ in all of this, but Christ Himself, who now lives within us, is the fulfillment. We don’t throw out the Old Testament words; for these were (and are) “child conductors” to bring people to Christ. No one has ever been able to completely keep those laws and each person therefore stands guilty before God. As believers born of the Holy Spirit, we have His divine seed within us—and His divine Seed is able to bring us deliverance and victory over our sinful self.

“But we...with unveiled face *beholding* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory...by the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

When we do find ourselves in a ditch, let’s take His grace and allow the Shepherd to lead us back to life on the narrow way.

13. Beholding Changes Us

“Oh Lord we’re empty, we’re hungry, we’re thirsty. We’re not here just religiously. We won’t settle just for forms; we don’t agree to be lukewarm. We want You to be our reality.”

Are those words not the cry of your heart? This morning I sensed the Lord downloading a fresh vision of *abiding in Him*. 1 John 2:28 says, “And now little children, abide in Him, that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”

Why do we followers of Christ keep falling back to self-effort in our daily lives? Take the example of dieting. We realize our bad habit of overeating and attempt again to stop it. What about a negative attitude; a lazy habit? How do we overcome and avoid the ongoing sense of shame for repeated failure?

I believe there is a key in that verse. When failing, could we realize the source of that failure is our *self-effort* versus *abiding*—resting, staying in that intimate relationship with Jesus? Remember the wonderful fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23? Love, joy, inner peace, patience [not just the ability to wait but how we act while waiting], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Apparently all these wonderful characteristics flow out of our lives as fruit when we are resting in the Holy Spirit.

The next time we become aware of great lack in an area of our life, let’s simply acknowledge we have slipped away from *resting in Christ*. Confess that, and draw near to Him again. I love Him more deeply as the years go by, for each failure makes me aware of how much I have been forgiven. He’s not inside us to condemn, but to invite; to draw us back to that intimate fellowship with Him with the ultimate goal of being our reality each day, and in each area of our life. Truly that is the only life which fully satisfies.

The question was asked, “Why does transformation in a believer take so long or is often stalled?”

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “But we all...*beholding*...the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image* from glory to glory...by the Spirit of the Lord.” This verse indicates that transformation into His image is the result of *beholding* Him. That seems too simple. It is simple, but perhaps not so easy.

Recall the account of the two sisters in Luke 10:41, “Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.” When Martha, worried and troubled about many things complained she had been left to serve alone, the Lord responded by saying, “But *one thing is needed*, and Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her.” *One thing* is needed and what is that?—“sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His word.” In other words, spending time to focus on Him. We could say, “beholding Him.”

What would *beholding* look like today? And is that the antidote to being worried and troubled about many things? Of course we have daily tasks to accomplish, but here is a clue to fulfilling them with grace. First of all: spend time with the Saviour; focus our mind on Him and on His Word. Like Mary, THAT is *the one thing we need* every day of our lives.

I love what the Lord says: “that good part will not be taken away from her.” Why? Because something of His divine life is transmitted into our being during those times—something eternal which produces a little more glory each time. Allow your hunger to bring you to the feet of our Saviour again—and you will be changed.



14. We Meet His Tender View

Early this morning when out gently watering my young plants I was reminded how tender our Father's love is toward us. In my desire to see my crop thrive I use rain water as much as possible, or water that's been standing overnight in a tub, so it won't be ice cold. On my hand held sprayer I also use the gentle *shower* setting instead of the harsh full stream. And I water in the morning or the evening when the sun's rays are less intense—when growing roots are more able to drink.

As a child I learned this simple song:

“God sees the little sparrow fall.
It meets His tender view.
If God so loves the little birds
I know He loves me too.”

Our Father cares like that for us. We are His crop—His children birthed by the Holy Spirit; and each day He earnestly desires to meet with us, to water us with His Words, His very life. Why? So we, like plants, can be nourished—so we can thrive even in a hostile environment. As we spend time drinking in His life we will soon grow and begin to manifest fruit. It will start with leaves but gradually there will be evidence of food which will nourish others we meet. Just as my tiny carrots, beets, and bean plants will supply many pounds of produce, so we will increasingly reflect the Master we love—bearing fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is described in Galatians 5:22,23: “love [unselfish concern for others], joy, inner peace, patience [not just the ability to wait but *how we act while waiting*], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (AMP)

I notice that morning and evening are best times to nourish plants. Perhaps that is a clue for us as well. Let’s encourage one another to set aside the early part of our day as well as the end. Just as earthly fathers desire their children to mature, so does our heavenly Father. He is watching over and loving us with that purpose in view. These plants do not look too hopeful perhaps, but with tender care in two months I will witness the miracle of growth; and so will we in one another’s lives if we just don’t give up.



15. Response Under Attack

As believers it takes very little time to realize there is much opposition to an intimate, flourishing walk with the Lord. I see this picture repeatedly reflected in the plant kingdom—particularly in the ones I attempt to grow. The weather may be too windy, too dry or too wet. It may be too hot or too cold, such as about two weeks ago when most of my bedding plants died after a late season frost—even though covered by large coffee cans. Undeterred, I purchased and planted new ones. (One secret to successful gardening is perseverance.)

With the second group beginning to grow I noticed another attacker: the “flea beetle;” a little black bug which jumps and eats leaves. Out comes my insecticidal soap, and a cloth to cover the coffee cans so those critters can’t escape after being sprayed. Will the technique be successful? Time will tell; and time will also reveal yet a different variety of opposition. It’s relentless. Successful gardening is not for the faint of heart.

But what does this look like in the spiritual realm of attack? Perhaps it’s when someone “despitefully uses you.” (Matthew 5:44) Maybe it gets worse and someone “insults you and persecutes you, and falsely says all kinds of evil things against you because of Christ.” (Matthew

5:11) Maybe that someone is even a fellow believer who has misunderstood you; or turned away from the Lord.

What is our Lord's antidote? "*Pray for those which despitefully use you.*" (Matthew 5:44) "*Bless those who persecute you...and do not curse them. Never repay evil for evil.*" (Romans 12:14, 17)

George Watson, a fearless preacher in the late 1800's tells of a challenge in his life when a certain enemy had done much to damage him and his family. When setting out to pray he says, "It came to me that I needed to love that man with the identical love that Jesus had for him. I was to be a living vessel in such union with the Holy Spirit that Jesus could love him through me. As I continued to plead with God ...suddenly the Spirit opened to my mind to see what a lovely Christian that man would make if he were thoroughly washed in Jesus' blood and filled with the Holy Spirit."

He continued on to write about such manner of praying. "*If we do not keep our hearts warm and pure, and very tender toward everybody on earth, we lose that sweet sense of oneness with Jesus—worth more than all the friendships. It is not my calling to make people love me; it is my great business to have perfect union with the Holy Spirit and to love all with God's love, whether they love me or not.*"

There is so much help in this example. We have each been forgiven so very much—and will continue to need forgiveness. We will continue to have opposition, instigated by the devil who hates us, and he will use people. We have something better than insecticidal soap, cloth covers and coffee cans to deal with these attacks. We have a God who fights for us. We can bring every attack to Him for He is our true shield and defender.

Let's ask Him to give us His heart's response—and He will.



16. Confused Identity

You may not see anything wrong with the little squash in this picture, but there is something very amiss. You see these are “acorn” squash and they’re supposed to be a solid dark green colour—not striped. What happened to change them?

Well—they were planted in the midst of; and grew together with something called “stripetti” squash, and as their name suggests they are striped—exactly like these in the picture. Due to cross-pollination the acorns took on the appearance of the stripetti which surrounded them!

This reminds me of the Lord’s warning, “Walk with the wise and become wise, for *a companion of fools suffers harm.*” (Proverbs 13:20) Those we spend a lot of time with definitely affect us. It’s interesting that, even in the plant kingdom close association of one can change the appearance of another. These squash may still be edible, but their colour and possibly their taste has been damaged. They have lost their unique identify.

When I was a young teenager there were very few Christians around me. Most of my friends were in love with the world and all the temptations it offered. If someone was watching my life at that time, it's very unlikely they would have called me a Christian. You might say I was looking *striped* like the squash in the picture. I was confused about my identity. It was only after living closely with believers for months, and spending time studying His Word each day that I began to lose my stripes. God captivated my heart and began revealing to me what His life looked like.

What about us? Will we seek close, regular fellowship with others who desire the Lord Jesus? We have a destiny to be “conformed to the image of Christ.”—not to the image of the world around us. Yes, we do need to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world but as Proverbs 4:23 says, we are to “Guard our heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life.”

17. Suffering — Never For Nothing

This is the title of a book by Elizabeth Elliot available in our church library. As a very young woman she lost her first husband to a violent attack from a people group they were attempting to win to the Lord. Soon afterwards Elizabeth with her tiny daughter and Rachel Saint, a sister to one of the other martyrs, actually lived with that tribe and saw many of them come to faith in Christ. Is that not amazing grace! Isaiah 43:2 was the verse the Lord impressed the young widow with: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.” She surely passed through some distressing situations but found the Lord to be so very faithful to His promise.

Years later Elizabeth remarried, only to lose her second husband to cancer after three and half years. She was definitely accustomed to suffering, but as she writes in her book, “Aren’t we all.” Each of us will have trials to walk through. She quotes these words from a young girl, blinded as an infant who refused to dwell on her handicap or wallow in self pity. “*I cannot, and I won’t.*” Fanny Crosby was that girl—one who lived to write thousands of wonderful hymns!

What would Joseph’s triumph have looked like if there had been no betrayal, no slavery, no dungeon prior to his being exalted? What about the drama of the three friends in the fiery furnace; Daniel in a pit with lions? David taking on the giant? Stories of epic battles thrive in our culture. Could the reason be that our inner being resonates with the awareness that struggle is necessary before victory can be celebrated?

Death and then resurrection: conflict and then victory—this is the pattern for each follower of Christ. Oh may we encourage one another to press through to the One who is truly able to bring us to the overcoming life in Him!

Another quote from this book: *“I cannot say to you I know exactly what you’re going through. But I can say that I know the One who knows. And I’ve come to see that it’s through the deepest suffering that God has taught me the deepest lessons.”* As one who has walked with the Lord for many decades I would agree. I would also say that I have received the most revelation by pressing to Him in my sorrows. He has changed and continues to change me.

Dear one, is there a situation in your life that causes you deep pain? I would encourage you to bring it all to Him, give it to Him, feed on His Words, and He will turn your sorrow into joy, for suffering is never intended to be for nothing.



18. I Will Repay You

One of my friends recently lamented, “Why do I bother telling others about God? They respond positively when they’re desperate, and then just as quickly turn away from Him again.”

Have we not all struggled with that disturbing question at times? Is there a good reason to persevere when those previously drawn to Christ turn away—sometimes even *against* us?

The answer of course is, “Yes!”

Recently I was reminded of the good Samaritan story in Luke 10 where a certain man, with compassion for a beaten victim poured oil and wine on the wounds and brought him to an innkeeper. After paying the debt already incurred, he made a request with a promise, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, *when I come again I will repay you.*”

Those words resonated in my heart. We are called to be like that certain Samaritan and the innkeeper, continuing to care for the wounded people He brings to our attention. The Lord Jesus, like that

hero in the story, will return one day with a promise to repay whatever we spend in compassionately caring for those He brings to us. In this life we may only see a fraction of the fruit produced by our obedience to His assignments, but our Lord is watching and He will richly repay!

In Luke 12:37-44 Jesus, the ultimate good Samaritan, charges His followers to be watchful, ready for His return—those who are will be richly blessed when He finds them caring for, encouraging and feeding their fellow believers.

As 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “...beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

So dear friend, if you find yourself discouraged with your laboring, take heart and continue to come to the One who is truly able to strengthen you in the journey; and also reward you in the end.

19. To Gain The Prize

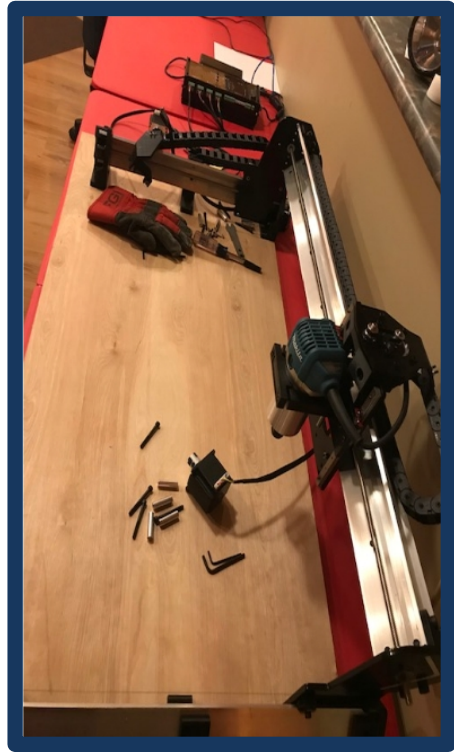
Likely there aren't many who would recognize the type of machine in this picture. I certainly would not have a clue if my dear husband had not ordered it. Called a CNC it arrived in pieces. Many, many pieces which he painstakingly fitted together. Why? Because he has a vision. This device can be used to produce intricate prize-

winning, amazing designs on wood. There is however a huge obstacle to push through—and that is—how does this mysterious thing actually work? After many hours of considering, researching and watching internet videos, he remains stuck.

But he is not going to give up.

I'm reminded of a verse: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of *kings* to search out a matter." (Proverbs. 25:2)

Believers today are called a *royal* priesthood, so I guess that puts each of us in the *kingly* category. How great is our inheritance as heirs of God! However, the secrets of these riches although very true, are discovered only as we dig into the incredible truths in His Book,



the Bible. Difficulties, stubborn obstacles, even desperation can all become helpers to spur us on in our search for the hidden treasure. We've heard of it. We know it's there! We tasted some already and have seen glimpses of His glory reflected on the faces and in the overcoming lives of other believers.

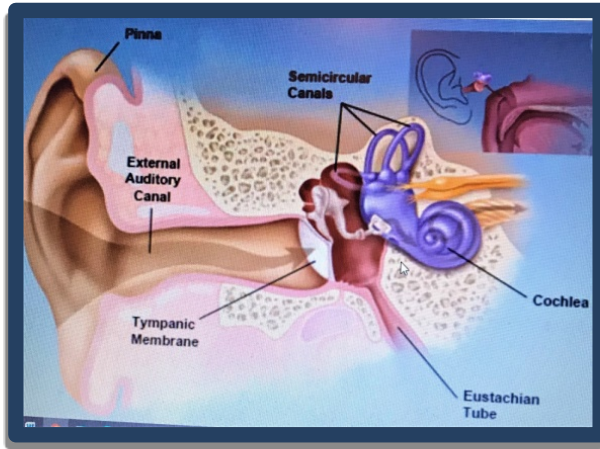
This year, will we purpose to keep coming to the One Who is able? If we do, I am confident our heavenly Father will reveal more than we can ask or think, of the riches He desires to give to us, His beloved children.

And you know, before many months go by I'm pretty sure my husband will be producing some prized possessions with his mysterious machine.

Update:

Here is one of his many stunning boards produced March 2022





20. When Rocks Come Loose

So...apparently we do have *rocks in our head*. Well, actually microscopic crystal rocks. There are thousands of them attached to equally tiny hairs, surrounded by fluid in that snail like looking structure above: the cochlea. Unfortunately for us, if one or more of those rocks come loose in our inner ear, their erratic movements in the fluid confuse the brain and extreme dizziness begins.

How *fearfully and wonderfully we are made*, for when all is working properly we are never aware of all this incredibly complex mechanism!

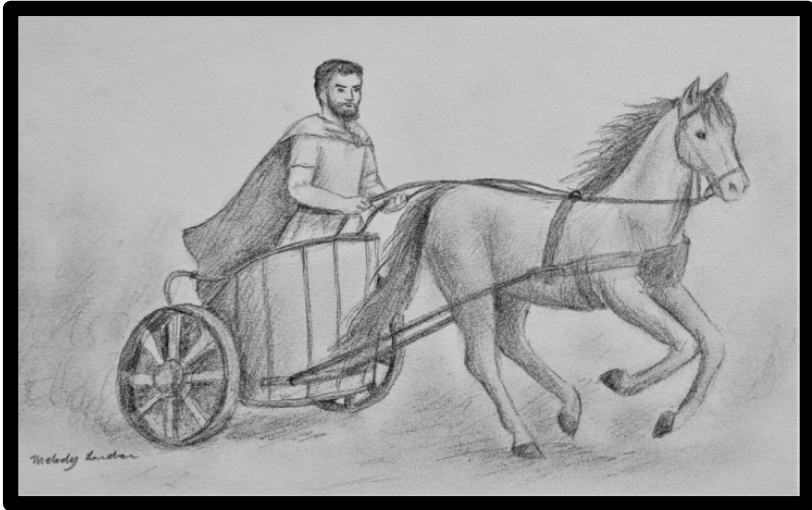
This past week one or more of those rocks came loose in me, and I can testify to the debilitating dizziness, nausea, and inability to walk steadily. Thankfully, years ago the Lord revealed to a doctor the cause of this condition...and the manoeuvre to relieve it! Thanks too, for internet information with step-by-step video instructions which even we older people could understand. With my dear husband's guidance I then found relief by applying those steps!

As I pondered how this may apply spiritually I was reminded how detailed and sensitive the Holy Spirit is. When we walk in obedience

to the Lord His peace reigns in us, but there is immediate lack of inner peace the moment we grieve Him in some way—like that tiny rock out of place in my ear which caused me so much discomfort. At times we may not be clear why we are unsettled, or why our walk with Him is affected but as we ask the Lord to reveal the problem, He is so faithful to do precisely that.

The answer or *manoeuvre* then is to obey whatever He says, and as we do the peace returns. What a practical help as we are learning to walk steadily according to the directions of His miraculous inner life. As our Shepherd says, “My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

What a great object lesson shown by our God who has created all things...even microscopic rocks.



21. Giants and Chariots of Iron

Joseph's descendants complained to Joshua they weren't given enough land for such a numerous tribe. Joshua responded with a challenge, "If you are a great people, then go up to the forest and clear a place for yourself in *the land of the giants*."

They suggested the forests were not enough for them, but there was another even more frightening obstacle in the valleys. The people there had chariots of iron!

Joshua reminds them, "'You are a great people and have great power.' Those places shall be yours. Even though the obstacles of giants and iron chariots are real, *you shall drive them out. You shall overcome.*" (Joshua 17:14-18 paraphrased)

This portion of Scripture touched my heart, for we also have "land" to inherit in our lives. Fear and anxiety can feel like giants. Christ came to give us victory in the battles we face, but we do have to co-operate with His power in us to take that victory.

Even though Joshua did not offer to help Joseph's descendants in their battle, he did encourage them; and it was not an *individual* fight, but they overcame as a team.

Again, this makes me aware of the supply we have together as believers. This week I was experiencing a giant of fear stubbornly intimidating me. When I confessed to one of my sisters in Christ she prayed and so did I—and that giant left!

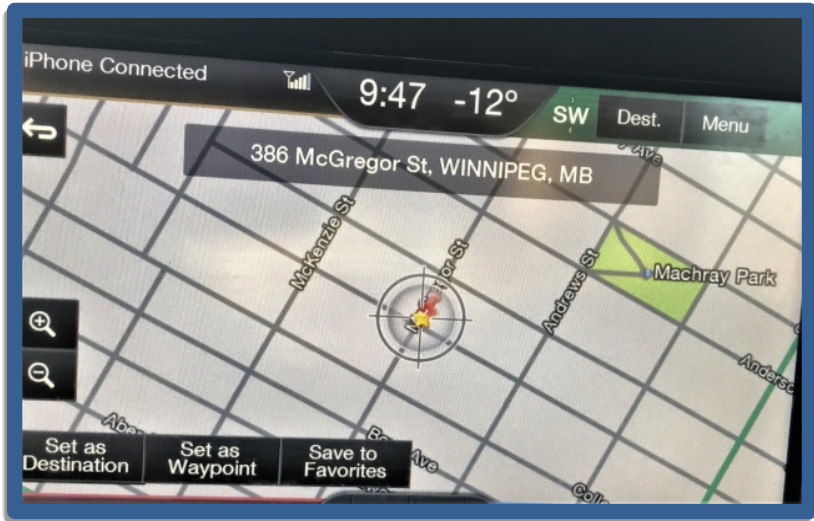
Many times we are aware there are *stongholds* in our soul, like chariots of iron—perhaps a bad habit or negative attitude which make victory so elusive. Perhaps it's some opportunity or challenge where we know the Lord is asking us to step toward, but we put it off. "It's too hard. It's too uncomfortable. I may fail."

Let's confess those struggles to someone who will encourage us to obey; then pray together—and take that territory. We have a great and powerful God living in us, and He is able.

As an anonymous author wrote:

“Let's take this land O Christian sisters;
this land that God has given us.
Be strong and take it, for we can make it;
and gain this land so glorious.”

(and ditto for the brothers!)



22. Searching

In our fancy car we have all kinds of bells and whistles (figuratively speaking)—sadly, most of which are wasted on me. Even though there is a wonderful GPS system installed, do you think I have actually used it properly? Some of you can relate to “techno-itis,” my made up word to describe an aversion to learning yet another new upgrade. I confess to suffering from such a condition, and grandchildren travelling to a destination with me can attest to that fact. Grandma often has to pull over, call on the Lord for help—or phone someone—again!

All this to say it reminds me of a verse, “These (people in Berea) were more fair-minded...in that they *searched the Scripture daily to find out whether these things were so.*” (Acts 17:11) Other versions says they were “*more noble...in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind*” (KJV) or that they “*were of more noble character...for they examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*” (NIV)

In this past year there has been growing chaos and upheaval, not just in society but I also sense it in the spiritual realm. There is much information and teaching abounding on the internet and in various books. Although some is unsettling I also realize any challenge can become a blessing *IF* I will come to the Lord with it all. We have in the Bible, the most perfect GPS installation. Let's allow all challenges to constrain us to come in a fresh way to the words of God and ask Him for the Holy Spirit to shine His light on the words. We also have access to seasoned brothers who teach sound doctrine. Don't be like me with the GPS in my car. Let's be like the Bereans who went to God's written word every day to "see if these things be so."

In this way we will experience being "...*no longer children, tossed to and fro* and carried about with every wind of teaching...but speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him..." (Ephesians 4:14, 15)



23. Every Area

Our dear sister, Rosa sent this picture to encourage and inspire. It reminds me of Ephesians 3:17 "...that Christ may *dwell in your hearts* through faith..." Another version says, "*make His home in your hearts.*"

We were made alive in our spirit (the innermost part of our being) when we received Christ but this same Person desires to take His rightful place in every part. That would include our thoughts, our emotions, and our choices—even our conscience; in other words every area of our lives.

This is called the process of sanctification and we are told to "be transformed by the renewing of our mind." (Romans 12:2) We are told in Isaiah 55:8, 9 "My thoughts are not your thoughts...for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Even though as believers in Christ *we are* already a new creation, there is still the need to read the details of our inheritance. Not only to read, but to feed on those words in the Bible until His thoughts and ways become ours.

Will we discover opposition to this? Will we feel as if we are being poked at; bothered when staying in an old habit or attitude? Yes, for we are relearning another life. The old ways and thoughts from our past will attempt to stop us.

We also have an enemy, the devil, who fights against our growth as believers. The good news is, "...greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." (1 John 4:4) Our perfect Father in heaven wants each of us to grow up in our faith walk. The Son has overcome all the works of the devil and He is now as the Holy Spirit living inside to bring each of us to victory.

So, when nudged, constrained, or pressured by circumstances let's realize He is working, with the purpose to conform us to the image of Christ. May this vision inspire and encourage us to press even more into our Lord, for we truly do have a glorious destiny!



24. The Robins Return

Several years ago a pair of robins unsuccessfully attempted to build a nest on top of the motion detector lights over our back door—and this year, after arriving with their flock, they succeeded.

I've often marvelled how the male and female bring twig after twig to their desired nest location—the pile of small pieces fallen on our back step testifying to their determination. As a reward for their combined efforts, the mother bird is seen on the finished nest, confidently incubating the eggs. Two weeks after laying them their efforts were rewarded with chicks—and now “mom and dad” are both busy dropping food into hungry mouths.

Job 12:7 “Ask the birds of the air and they will tell you.” What do their actions tell?

They show us the importance of a pair working together in a committed way—male and female, expressing God's design for preparing and raising the young He gives. They show us the power of determination in the face of challenges. This picture reveals how both mother and father are necessary and therefore equally

important, even when their roles differ. I'm also sure birds do not focus on past failures—they left the failed twigs just where they fell.

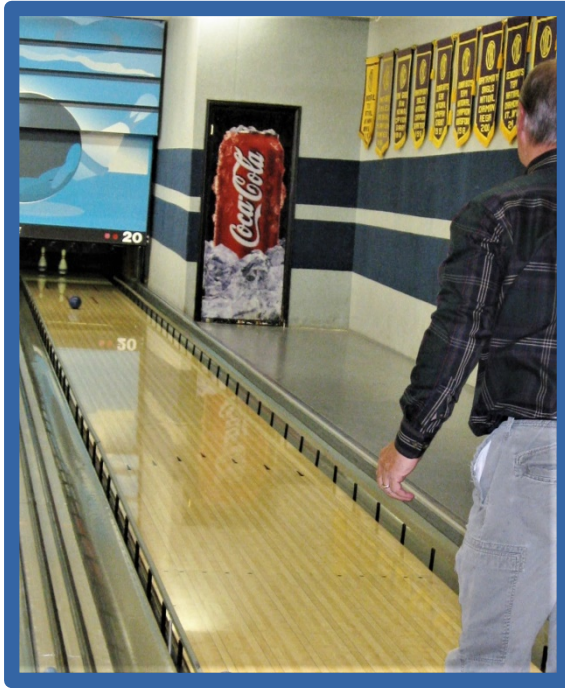
How sad when we see and hear of alternate designs being promoted today, for statistics continue to clearly reveal the superiority of God's plan.

Yes, we may fail—perhaps even leaving a pile of failures like unusable twigs. Perhaps following through with God's plan has been unbelievably difficult. But oh; let's not scrap His blueprint, as the world may tell us to do.

Our great Creator is able to strengthen us.

Even if in this broken world we find ourselves carrying on alone; as believers in Christ we never are, for He is with us, and He will lift us up.

Psalm 91:4 “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.”



25. Gutter Guards

Years ago, when bowling with grandchildren we discovered gutter guards. A young grandson, on his first game protested the use of such items but I knew he (and I) would definitely benefit from using them. It was amazing to witness the ball glancing off the guard on one side, and then the other—followed by a perfect strike!

Gutter guards are similar to helpful boundaries; like certain laws in our life to guide us to victory. God has set these in place and humans ignore them to their peril. Perhaps it's more obvious in the weakness of the very young or the very old, but the fact is, we need boundaries throughout our lives.

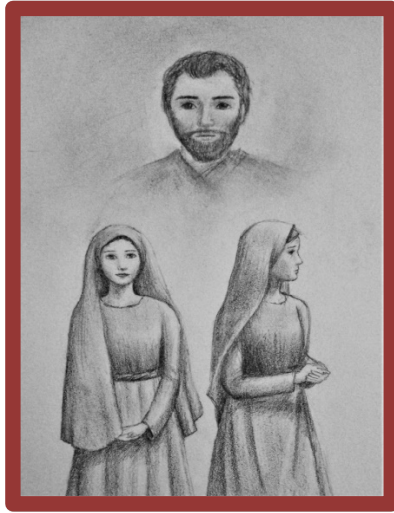
I was reminded of a word called: “entropy”—a law describing how everything breaks down and tends towards disorder over time, unless overcome by intelligent intervention.

It’s easy to view entropy: gardens left untended are overgrown, metals rust, food rots, homes fall into disrepair, aging bodies weaken.

Small wonder our Lord instructs us to: “Guard your heart with all diligence,” (Proverbs 4:23 NIV) for even our heart can fall into disrepair and disorder. A negative thought, attitude or action can become a destructive habit. It can become a lie believed until the soul is strangled and snared. We would all be hopeless if the One who created us had not sent His Son as a divine intervention to overturn this entropy in our heart. His life is indestructible and forever perfect.

Seven times in Mark 13 Jesus tells His followers: “Take heed, watch.” Just as each body needs daily maintenance, so does each heart. Just this week I heard of three precious people who once walked with the Lord, but sadly no longer. One was killed in a bar room brawl, one recently survived a drug overdose, and another is simply spiritually numb. None of this happened over night but with little choices to disregard the warnings of the inner divine life.

Precious ones, please come to Him each day. Let’s shake off the sin that so easily besets us. We have a Saviour who is willing to constantly renew our minds and set us free. He is the most perfect “gutter guard” of all.



26. Will the Redeemer be Enough?

Apparently young Ruth, recently widowed and childless, had seen something genuine; even compelling in the lives of her husband and her mother-in-law, for when Naomi headed back to Bethlehem Ruth refused to remain in her native country. She left everything behind saying, “Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.” (Ruth 1:16)

Ruth was willing to push into territory unfamiliar to her because of the vision she had been given. Her background and culture had been quite different from those of the godly family into which she had married. *What would Naomi’s new people be like? Would they accept her?* Her vision, her need to know more of Naomi’s God compelled her to take the risk.

Awareness of her desperate need brought her to a place of great humility, and a willingness to diligently do whatever was needed.

When this foreigner presented herself to work in a field, gleaning barley she was amazed to find the owner extremely gentle; even

generous. Ruth bowed before him, and asked, “Why should you be so kind and concerned for me?”

After several weeks of working in Boaz’s fields, Naomi who knew him to be a near relative, asked her daughter-in-law to do something we would consider even more humbling. She asked Ruth to show by her actions and her asking that she wanted him to marry her. There is no word about Ruth offering a different opinion or an argument. She did exactly what Naomi suggested—and she was not disappointed.

This foreigner with deep faith was soon married to the man they called their kinsman redeemer.

What a picture of the Saviour who is waiting for His bride! Boaz acted quickly when he found her ready. *Do we not also have a Bridegroom waiting; longing for His Bride to be ready so He can claim her?*

Let’s ask the Lord for a vision like Ruth’s. Then with willingness, diligence, and humility, do whatever He asks. I believe He is calling us. We also desperately need a Redeemer—and, like Ruth, if we continue to obey His leading we will not be disappointed!



27. Water Keeps on Flowing

Driving through the B.C. interior this sight definitely grabbed my attention. “Dave, stop the car, I need to take a picture!” In the Bible we have heard of water flowing out of a rock, but have you ever seen it?

You may recall the account in Exodus 17 of thirsty, complaining people blaming their leader, Moses, “*You made us* come out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place.” Notice how facts get twisted when feelings are stirred up. The response of Moses was that he cried out to the Lord in desperation. He was then instructed to strike the rock which he did—and water came out. The thirsty people were satisfied. (temporarily)

The Bible tells us that Jesus was the Rock which followed His people (1 Corinthians 10:4), and we know He was struck on the cross. Payment for our sin was made through His obedience. What an amazing gift!

As the water that day miraculously met the need of God's people in a desperately dry situation; our Saviour, now resurrected and living within us, is able and oh so willing to satisfy our thirst. 1 Corinthians 6:17 states that we believers are, "*joined to the Lord...*" and Galatians 3:5 says, "*He...supplies the Spirit to you...*" What a wonderful position—*joined* to an Almighty God! And what a wonderful, ongoing supply from the Holy Spirit!

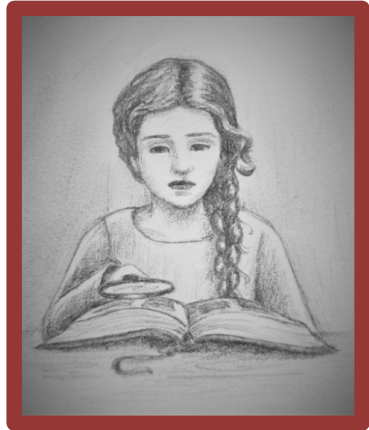
Difficult situations and everyday pressures make us thirsty, which in turn can make us cranky and critical. Negative feelings can twist the truth, as they did so long ago to God's people in the desert. When we find ourselves in that sad condition yet again, let's ask the Lord to remind us. It is His desire to flow as the Spirit, much like the water in this picture—continuously strengthening and refreshing our soul.

Just as you see the water gushing bountifully out of the rock; that is how much our Lord desires to flow like a river out of the innermost part of our being—every moment of every day. Our need is simply to realize how empty we are, and then open our heart to Him again.

"Lord Jesus, I confess my great need. Right now I come and drink in Your life-giving words."

28. A Different Lens

Each year on September 11 we are reminded of the swift and vicious attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Virginia, and the attempt on a third location that fateful day in 2001. Another event which has shaken our world with fear is Covid-19. Who hasn't questioned the flood of confusing information and the moving goal posts of safety?



We've heard the phrase, "things are not always as they seem." So... what is God doing behind the scene in all this activity? What is His way of looking at "suddenlies?"

Acts 12 records, "an angel struck Herod...he was eaten by worms and died." No one actually saw the angel do that...yet that was the truth behind the scene. Secular media would have a natural explanation; perhaps like the following. "During a recent visit to the city of Tyre, King Herod developed a strange and terrible case of parasites in his intestines and died shortly after. Sources say, there's a definite possibility that someone in the city purposely put contaminated meat in his food as it is well known there has been recent animosity toward him."

But, what does God say in His inspired word? "An angel struck him..."

How about the record in 2 Kings 19 of the strange overnight death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, as they laid siege against Jerusalem? How might secular media (the natural mindset) cover such a story?? "One night last week a strange sickness caused the death of Assyrian

troops. The position of their camp made them susceptible to plague-infested mice. Other sources suggest they were poisoned by Israeli spies who infiltrated their camp.” But what does the lens of God’s record reveal? “And it came to pass that on a certain night the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians...”

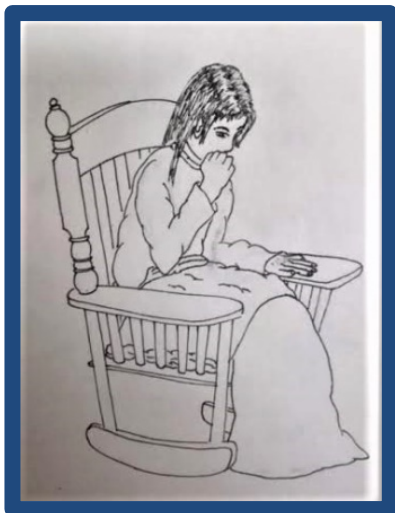
When overwhelmed with daily news of violence and diseases what do we do? There is so much information...and so much *misinformation* which often leaves us distressed and confused. Who is telling the truth?

I find a great need to see *beyond* the natural, to God’s view. I find comfort in reading what our Father, the Almighty God has recorded for us in the Bible. No, I don’t understand much of what He allows, but He tells us He is, “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” When ready, He is well able to deal with violent, evil agendas on this earth—simply by using one angel if He chooses!

Let’s ask God for His lens as we read His Word, then hide that truth in our hearts so, as King David did in 1 Samuel 30:6 we can “encourage our hearts in the Lord our God.”

When my husband had his cataracts replaced with clear lenses he said many times, “This is like a miracle! I didn’t realize how poorly I was seeing.” Isn’t that similar to our *natural* view versus *God’s*? It is so easy, in the midst of the noise of this age, to miss what our Lord is saying and doing—hidden behind the scenes—under the radar so to speak.

“Lord, open my eyes to see as you do.” When I see through His lens, I am at peace—aren’t you as well?



29. Healing and Praise

I was in my twenties. It was shaping up to be one of those dark days; a day clouded with disappointment, depression, and self-pity. Again. Was I in physical pain? No; this was a distress of the soul and I was stuck there. Perhaps if I called several close friends they would sympathize with me; they would join my “pity party.” But not one was available. I would have to walk through this one alone. In fact, perhaps that is exactly what my Lord had in mind.

The thought then rose within me, *you are not alone. I am with you.* Yes, I did know the Lord had promised never to leave me but how was that to help? A second thought followed with the question, *are you willing to come to Me?* Yes I was. These moods were exerting a growing dominance over me; pushing me deeper into despair—a warning of possible permanent harm to my soul.

After expressing willingness to come, God’s promises began to flow into my mind. I spoke them out loud; savoring them slowly; thoughtfully. The first reminder was, “*Resist the devil* and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7) So...the negative thoughts, producing

the dark moods were coming from the enemy of my soul, and I simply needed to verbally resist; to reject them. As I obeyed that instruction more truths came to my awareness. “He restores *my soul*.” (Psalm 23:3) “He is the Lord who *heals me*.” (Exodus 15:26) “He *heals all* of your diseases.” (Psalm 103:3) My heart began to be nourished and strengthened as I drank in what God had written. Like a miracle, less than an hour later the damaging mood had disappeared and in its place peace reigned—the wonderful peace of Christ; and now I was praising Him.

Later, checking the Hebrew definition of *heal*, I discovered synonyms such as: *mends, cures, repairs*. While reminding me of His living words, our amazing Shepherd continued the process of *restoring* me. A troubled soul was lovingly taught how to be rescued from a dark place, by walking through the valley that day with my Saviour. “He sent His word and healed *her*.” (Psalm 107:20) And He will do the same for you.



30. A Mistake Becomes a Blessing

As a twenty year old beginning the various rotations of our nursing program I was full of energy and optimism—until the day I hit a wall!

We had begun administering injections and medications on the surgical ward to prepare patients for their impending operations, and on this particularly memorable day I was to correctly insert a suppository into an elderly lady. This in turn, would cleanse her bowel for her scheduled abdominal surgery.

Finding the prescribed item in the fridge I confidently inserted it and explained to my patient she could expect the suppository to work within minutes. To avoid an accident on the bed I then positioned her on the bedpan and requested she use the call light when success was achieved.

When I didn't hear from her after a reasonable amount of time, my instructor walked with me into the room to assess the situation. To

my surprise and to my instructor's puzzlement, my lady was sound asleep, softly snoring; her mouth gaping. The bedpan, still in place, remained empty. Upon questioning me, then retracing our steps back to the refrigerator, we discovered I had mistakenly given a suppository used to promote a sound sleep—and it apparently was very effective for that purpose!

Looking back on the memory it sounds humorous but at the time it felt as if I had committed the “unpardonable sin.” Although my careless mistake was very unsettling, it actually became a blessing. I learned to strictly check three times before administering any medication, and never made further errors in my three years of training.

I also brought my nursing plans seriously to the Lord for His direction and He reassured me not to quit, for my immediate reaction was to do exactly that. In the future I became less confident in my natural ability and much more reliant on His way of directing my steps. This near disaster helped me learn the truth of Proverbs 16:9 “A ‘woman’s’ heart plans ‘her’ way, but the Lord directs ‘her’ steps.”



31. Blessings of Pruning

If you look at the picture on the left it's hard to believe those naked vines, only six months later, could produce the picture on the right... and yet, that is exactly what happened!

If that pruned vine could speak, I'm sure it would have protested, "Why are you doing this to me? This is certainly not fair, and it's so very painful! I'm not sure I can survive this."

As followers of Christ, have we not echoed those same questions when painful situations arrive?

At times, for no apparent reason, while walking in fellowship with our Saviour, something hurts us deeply. It may be a failure on our part. It may be a loss of a deep relationship. It may look like a disease; or any number of circumstances. In each case it will be painful and difficult to understand; unless we see the truth of John 15:2 *"...and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*

Yes, we can delay the process of fruit-bearing by running from Him; by shutting down in anger, blame, or self-pity. We can attempt to distract ourselves with endless entertainment and earthly pursuits. I

think each of us has fallen into those patterns at times. I confess to it myself.

After failing, I finally discovered how much better it is to “*Humble myself under the mighty hand of God.*” He doesn’t ask us to like His painful pruning in the moment or season of it, but oh how we reap the benefits of a deeper walk with the Saviour when we do surrender!

When we draw nearer to Him in our pain and confusion, He, as the Vine is able to do the miraculously divine work of flowing His life through us. Just as the grapes flourishing in the picture bore more fruit after the pruning, so will we—fruit which will last for eternity. Co-operating with our Lord will bring to our ears the wonderful words: “Well done, good and faithful servant...” when we stand before Him at the judgement seat of Christ.

“Dear Lord, may we learn to trust You during times of trouble, believing that in Your perfect love, You have our eternal destiny in mind.”



32. Alone or Together

Take a look at the pictures above and consider—these trees are the same age, but very different. Those on the right are much taller. They have healthy, straight trunks and branches, and they are standing together while the one on the left is stunted, misshapen with branches missing or half dead. The *group* is flourishing while the *solitary one* is barely alive.

Although all these were planted by us, the one on the left was put into ground which had never been tilled. Standing quite alone, it is unprotected from the harsh Manitoba winters and driving winds. It's also much more isolated and therefore difficult for us to care for.

The trees we planted in a group are more sheltered from the adverse environment, plus the ground had been ploughed. They have benefited one another. How about us?

I see this as such a picture of our need to maintain closeness with other believers—the other *trees* if you like. Even when *branches* from those nearby may irritate and poke us in ways that are uncomfortable at times, standing together gives us strength.

Difficult circumstances will tempt us to isolate ourselves or shut down, but to do so will stunt our growth. We all may know believers who have wandered away from others who are pursuing the Lord. I personally know of many who have done just that. They have lost their taste for Him; and unless clearly asked, no observer would guess they were Christians. God tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that each believer in Christ is a member of His body and therefore members of one another. We would never consider a *human* body with multiple missing parts to be an example of what God desires, but sadly, this vision for Christ's body is greatly lacking.

Just as a forest protects the trees, the Body of Christ grants protection and a supply to its members—the branches.

So dear fellow believers, the next time we feel scratched or poked by another *branch*, let's not leave, but instead cling to the One who gives life to His body. As we have opportunity for Christian fellowship let's seek it, "...and so much the more as we see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25).



33. We Have a Choice

Can we not all relate to the battle going on in this picture? Notice how the "spirit" part of the person is willing, but the surrounding parts are making excuses.

In John 3 Jesus told Nicodemus, "...that which is born of the Spirit is your spirit." When born again the Holy Spirit comes in and joins Himself to our spirit, our innermost part, and He in us is always eager, willing, and ready to obey.

Later Jesus points this out, but with a warning. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41) We can be led by the Spirit, but that is a choice. Who will we agree to be led by?

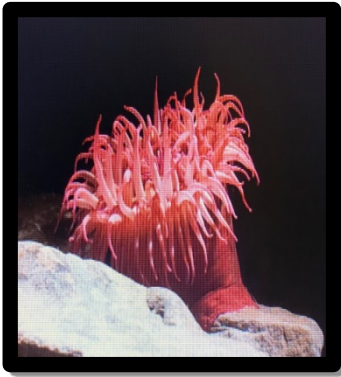
Our heavenly Father will never force us to obey, but He will definitely reward us every time we do. How?—by experiencing the wonderful fruit of the Spirit, and increasing transformation of our souls. When we allow the Spirit in us to lead, we are being transformed—changed from glory to glory. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

I wish I could say it has consistently been my decision to allow the Holy Spirit to lead me, but sadly, too many times I still allow opposing thoughts in my mind to take over. That in turn affects my mood and then my choices.

How refreshing and encouraging to be reminded there is a part of our being that is willing and able to obey! Each time we stand with His life in our spirit, we sense victory but each time we refuse we sense defeat.

How wonderful to know we can honestly confess and return again to a walk of obedience...co-operating with God’s life in us! Each day is a new beginning—a new opportunity to experience the overcoming power of His life. I loved the day when Romans 6:14 was revealed to me. “For sin will not have dominion over you.”

Precious fellow followers of Christ, with authority we can say, “No!” to the sin that wants to keep us in bondage to a life of defeat. Jesus has come to set us free. When co-operating with His overcoming life in us we can experience the taste of that inheritance right now!



34. Sea Anemone Response

Island life afforded many delightful opportunities to play on the fascinating beaches. Salt water is teeming with life, and one such colorful inhabitant is a “sea anemone” (called a polyp). This creature lives in its round cylindrical shell attached to rocks where it feeds on tiny sea life with its gently moving and beautifully colored tentacles. However, the lovely creation quickly withdraws, folding in the delicate appendages when touched by a threatening object. This mechanism protects from perceived danger, but if it remains too long in this defensive position, future fitness and feeding opportunities are severely compromised.

Everything our Almighty God has created reveals something more about Him. Job 12:7 says, “But now ask the beasts and *they will teach you.*” In this particular creature I can perceive such a profound lesson for us as believers. Of course we need to discern levels of danger—“*The prudent considers well his steps.*” (Proverbs 14:15) but to remain in a *shut-down* condition is dangerous to our healthy growth.

Studies of this polyp have shown that when there is physical nearness with even one other anemone or with numbers in close proximity, they re-emerge much earlier. They open up to feed more

quickly. What a picture, confirming our need as believers to maintain close fellowship with others, while firmly joined to our Lord, the true Rock. The Bible declares that we are “...members of one another.” We need each other.

Why?—Because there is a supply in following our Lord together. We do have an enemy who threatens us, but let’s encourage one another to open up again to feed on the One who gives us His overcoming life! Even to reach out for fellowship with two or three others is a good start, and as we enjoy our Savior together, we can also be exercised and nourished in His life—displaying more of His glory—glory which can be pictured in creation as seemingly simple as the sea anemone.



35. The Ultimate “Paying it Forward”

Most of us love a good bonfire. Recently though, with tears, my widowed friend witnessed the burning of many items she and her husband had greatly valued. This decluttering; letting go of the past was extremely painful. Could nothing have been salvaged? Had it really been necessary to burn so many valued things so quickly?

In her case, perhaps not.

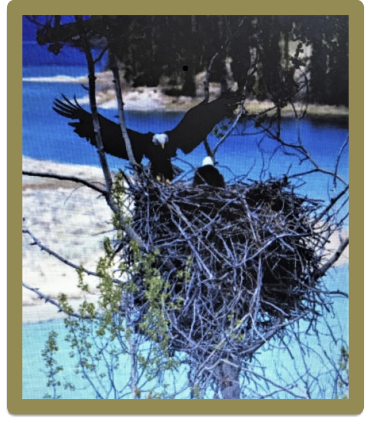
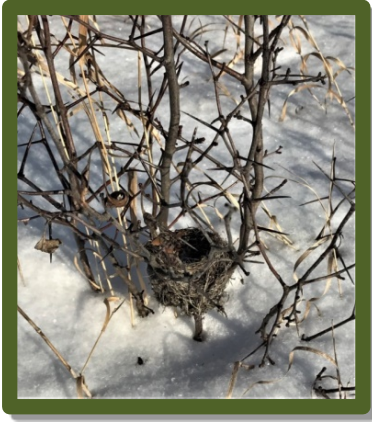
But it brought to my mind the very sobering verse, “For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ.” (Romans. 14:10) Yes, even as followers of Christ our lives here will be examined by Him. “...the fire will test each one’s work of what sort it is.” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15) The verses go on to say believers will be saved, but if their work burns, that person will suffer a loss of some kind. The agonizing tears of regret we may shed then will be much greater than those of my dear friend.

Many believers today have a sense there is a sinister global agenda taking hold, behind the reality of a virus. If that is true—if we are

coming near to the end of this age—how alert, how watchful we need to be. No, we cannot change God’s timeline, for He is still in control, but Jesus warned us many times to “be ready.”

How? Purpose each day to come to Him as the bread of life. Feed richly on His words. Then obey what He says—co-operate by faith as He reveals the steps you are to take. If we each continue to do that, we will have no need to fear a huge bonfire when comes the time for the judgment seat of Christ. There will be eternal rewards instead!

Now that is a “paying it forward” scenario that is more than amazing!



36. The Birds Will Tell You

“Ask...the birds of the air will tell you.” (Job 12:7)

Watching God’s creatures can reveal His order, even in a fallen world. Did you know 85-90% of male bird species help equally with feeding the brooding female and then the chicks? Some male birds even build their nests first and then seek their mate, but usually you see both parents busily building, then caring for their young—both equally committed to the task.

In observing nests it occurred to me how extremely vulnerable the babies are. The nest in the top left picture looks like *easy picking* for any predator but in the top right picture: the danger would be a fatal fall from that height.

So, why do so many survive? Part of the answer is: *they are destined to fly*. Studies show those hatched closer to the ground learn to fly more quickly. (Sounds like a very good plan.) Those on higher branches begin by flapping their wings then taking hopping steps before risking a flight in the air. Eagle parents hover over their young, then carry them on their wings—or swoop underneath a *learner* to catch him.

How are the Lord's children protected? Has He also provided provision to fly away from danger? In a way, yes for God gives us pictures of that in His word.

"They who wait upon the Lord shall...*mount up with wings* as eagles." (Isaiah 40:31) Another verse proclaims: "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." (Exodus 18:4)

Many heartaches in this fallen world are caused by blindness to God's way of escape. As followers of Christ we are still learning; but we who have met Him can know He will never leave us—no matter how vulnerable our nest may seem.

Our heavenly Father hovers over us. He who sees even one sparrow fall from its nest has counted every hair on our heads. When we fear what lies ahead, when we feel unprotected, let's cry out to Him and allow Him to bring us into a more intimate relationship with Himself.

In that way I believe we will each experience a taste of flying, and say, "Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler." (Psalm 124:7)



37. Alienated

Have you ever felt *alienated*? Synonyms include: isolated, estranged, separated, cut off. Surely every one of us has walked through relationships which caused such painful distress.

A close friend is no longer interested in being a part of your life and walks away. A group with whom you were closely connected rejects you. Someone you offended, has now *written you off*—no replies to texts, phone calls or emails—even after

you have asked forgiveness. A person you love avoids you because they no longer wish to follow the Lord.

The apostle Paul can certainly relate to that. Remember Demas, once a close co-worker, later described as one who, “...has forsaken me, having loved this present world...” In the same letter Paul also wrote “...all those in Asia have turned away from me.” (2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10) That precious brother knew what it was to feel the pain of being isolated, cut off, and indeed our Lord told us this will occur in our lives as well.

Sadly, at times alienation is deserved due to serious or inappropriate behavior. If guilty of that, we need to humble ourselves and demonstrate our repentance with a change in our life. The consequence may still be a broken relationship, but at least our

conscience before God and man can become clear and our walk with Him can be fully restored again.

In describing unbelievers Ephesians 4:17 says they are: “*alienated* from the life of God.”—separated, estranged from the One who created them. This is such a serious and sad condition; the alienation of every person before meeting the Son of God.

What amazing mercy that He would send His Son to restore that broken relationship, for Jesus declared He, “...has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) His mighty arms are ready to forgive and receive any who will simply acknowledge their need and come to Him. Many people walk through life never realizing this wonderful offer. Alienation from the One who created them seems normal; even though they sense something is missing from their life.

In musing over the word *alienated*, it occurred to me a painful separation from a previously close friend could be one way the Lord uses to draw us closer to Him. It grieves the heavenly Father to have people separated from Him, but it also grieves Him when there is a lukewarm relationship between Him and one of His children.

Next time we feel *cut off*, *separated* from someone we love, with humility let's make things right as far as depends on us. But also, be reminded of God's heart which yearns to fill up any human lack with a deeper intimacy with Him. We were born for this—more than we may long to be reconciled to someone dear to us. The Saviour will not reject one who comes to Him. His arms are open to heal any alienation for He is the true “Friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24)



38. Eyes Like Fire

Fire: a terribly destructive force or a life-saving source of heat.

I vividly recall the wall of fire roaring out the back door of my childhood home, leaving nothing after its rampage but a few bits of melted glass and a metal tub. The Bible describes God as a “consuming fire.” We are told many times He will “kindle a fire” as a form of judgement, and hell is described as a place of unceasing fire.

Fire: something to be feared or something to be enjoyed, but never something to be ignored.

Revelation 1:14 describes the Son of God as having “*‘all seeing’ eyes...flashing like a flame of fire ‘piercing’ into my being.*”(AMP) Why *piercing*?—because He sees right into our hearts.

Recall the scene when Peter was hanging out in the nearby courtyard while Jesus was being tried. Although he had rather proudly asserted he would never deny the Lord, the following day looked like this:

“While he was still speaking [to deny Christ] a rooster crowed. The Lord turned *and looked* at Peter.” (Luke 22:60, 61) Those eyes, that look, melted the apostle and he wept bitterly over his failure.

Yet we are encouraged to “look unto Jesus;” (Hebrews 12:2) to *focus our eyes* on Him; to “behold Him.” (John 1:36)

Another aspect of fire is its purifying quality, and as we purpose to look to our Lord Jesus He is able to cleanse and purify our hearts. He did so with Peter and He is purposing to do so in each of us.

So, each day of our lives here, let’s encourage one another to “Look and live,” for He who called us is able to transform each one as we focus on Him.



39. Even While Perishing

The liniments, meds, and treatments for various ailments in our medicine cabinet remind me of the verse, "...our outward man is perishing." Although we may not like to think about this, each of us is actually on what I picture as a slow moving *conveyor belt* which will one day usher us to the end of this life. Occasionally there is a *jolt* on the belt—a little reminder that we are not here permanently. My husband's open heart surgery was a big jolt.

Thankfully that is not the full verse, for it begins; "We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)

As seniors it has become more evident our bodies are slowly wasting away, but we don't have to lose hope, for something wonderful is also happening: "our inner man" is being renewed every day.

The Bible speaks of an "incorruptible seed, an incorruptible life" which we receive when we open our hearts by faith to invite the Lord Jesus in. A part of us is miraculously new for Jesus told Nicodemus, "...that which is *born* of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6)

There is an indestructible part deep within each Christian believer; a part which can actually be empowered and refreshed day by day.

How does that happen? Again our Lord tells us, "...come to Me and drink...out of 'your' innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38) There is the clue. Have you ever noticed how encouraged you feel after spending time absorbing God's words in the Bible? Aches and problems have not disappeared but there is the grace and strength to walk through the day. There is an awareness of being "strengthened with power in the inner man." (Ephesians 3:16)



40. Winter's World

The tree looks dead. Strips of bark have been chewed away by hungry squirrels. Leaves have fallen long ago. There is no sign of life.

When our friend from Ghana arrived in the midst of winter he asked, “Why do people here leave so many dead trees standing?” The answer remained a mystery until the end of winter...a very long, frigid winter.

Moses was inspired to write: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, *winter and summer...shall not cease.* (Genesis 8:22) Much later King David echoed those words: “You have made summer and winter.” (Psalm 74:17)

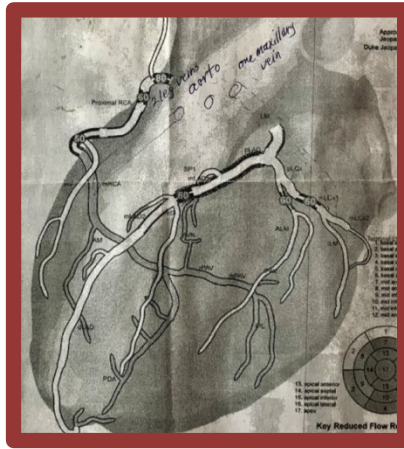
Winter nights are very long in our northern hemisphere and they can be extremely cold. Some people succumb to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) because of them. Combined with the sudden loss of a loved one, and the season can feel as if it will never end. Waves of depression and grief sweep over the soul like fresh snow swirling; whipped up by a bitter wind, and threatening to completely obscure

the vision. So easy for a grieving soul to lose sight of the goodness, the faithfulness of the One who created all this.

And yet we have His promise. Winter will not last forever. Spring will come, releasing the life-giving sap to flow through the trees. Tiny buds will begin to form on lifeless looking branches. Warmer, healing breezes will blow. The season for apparent deadness will pass and hope is renewed.

When in the midst of a winter season in our life, we can draw near to God. He is with us, whether we *feel* Him or not. Not only that, you and I are told, “Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” (Philippians 3:12)

Yes, He has a grip on you and on me, and will never let go. What a hope when I find myself in a season of winter’s world.



41. Blockages

Sitting peacefully beside my husband after his routine angiogram I was anticipating good results. The procedure—a necessary step prior to replacing his faulty mitral valve—had gone well. I had often joked that, with his constantly warm feet and hands he obviously had nice large blood vessels.

The hours slowly ticked by while Dave was carefully monitored. Finally the attending doctor arrived, carrying the picture of my husband’s heart—the arteries clearly outlined by the dye.

Contrary to my optimistic opinion, the news was anything but good! As the surgeon slowly explained, we found our eyes fixated on a number of damaged coronary arteries—two of which were 80% blocked and accompanied with large amounts of plaque deposits. Stents to open them were out of the question. Dave would need *triple bypass surgery* as well as a valve replaced. I felt my heart sink like a heavy stone and later while explaining to one of our sons, burst into tears on the phone.

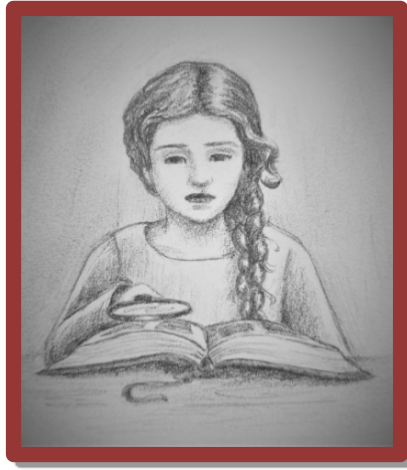
Damaged blood vessels associated with higher blood pressures have been named, “the silent killer”—silent because there are often no

symptoms until a fatal stroke or heart attack takes the life of a person. In my husband's case there were absolutely no warning chest pains or even shortness of breath; but now we became painfully aware of the truth. Major heart surgery was necessary.

Recently a giant ship with thousands of containers on board became stuck sideways in the Suez Canal blocking hundreds of other large vessels from going through. The necessary flow of traffic came to a sudden halt. And the world of trade experienced a heart attack of sorts, as a major supply line was severed.

How clearly this canal issue and my husband's heart blockage applies to the spiritual realm. God says in His Word, "Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flows the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Another version says "*Guard, keep your heart above all else...out of it spring the issues of life.*" Our physical heart is the source of our life; everything we do flows from it. According to our Lord Jesus, as believers our innermost heart contains the source of *His life*. We are to guard this part ever so carefully—paying close attention to our conscience, our attitudes, choices, and thoughts. For just as blockages occur in our physical blood vessels, we can experience obstructions in our spiritual life as well.

When we realize something is interfering with His flowing in us, oh how we need to ask our Lord to shine into our hearts. When He faithfully points out the problem let's be diligent to obey whatever He says, and His life saving surgery will be done, allowing His life to flow again before lasting damage appears.



42. Worth The Search

In 2018 the biggest yellow diamond in North America was found in northern Canada: 552 carats—over 3 ½ pounds! Diamond mines may begin as open pits, but gradually go to depths of 700 metres and more. Rarely are they easily found, lying on the surface. Canada, the world’s fifth largest producer, sold \$2.9 billion worth of diamonds in 2017—a huge return for the investment of the mine owners!

Mining takes much effort and cost to those who seek those treasures and that reminds me of a parallel I see in God’s Word. “It is the glory of God to *conceal* a matter, but the glory of kings is to *search* out a matter.” (Proverbs 25:2) The New Testament gives us a hint where treasures may be found. Colossians 2:3 says, “Christ, in whom are *hidden* all the *treasures* of wisdom and knowledge.” I see several words here that impress me—*conceal, search, hidden. treasures.*

Something *concealed* or hidden will require searching to discover. The word, *treasures*, implies the effort required to *search* will definitely be worthwhile.

In my own experience, I have discovered diamonds of truth after spending time poring over verses, then meditating and praying with them until able to speak or pray without looking. They are now hidden in my heart and available for the Holy Spirit to bring to my mind as He pleases. And He does! Those “*logos*” (black and white words) become “*rhema*” to me—a direct speaking from the Lord. And that experience has been repeated many, many times.

Over the decades of practicing this, my mind has been, and continues to be, slowly renewed. I find myself thinking more of God’s ways and less of my own. I find conviction from Him who lives within me when my attitude, actions or words quench His Spirit.

Most people consider a brilliant diamond to be a precious “wow factor,” and rightly so; but how much more we are privileged to have the very living words of our heavenly Father. As the verse says, this is *the glory of kings to search out*. Kings are ones who reign, with ability to exercise authority.

The effort to mine God’s words now will produce treasures worth more than the most excellent of diamonds, not only in this life but also in the next as well.



43. Euodia, Syntyche, and Demas

Previously I wrote about blockages in our hearts, and it reminded me of two dear sisters in Philippi (a city in Greece.) Apparently these two had been laborers in the gospel with Paul. They were valuable members of the Church, however something had come between them. This conflict was known by the rest of the church family, for Paul had heard about it while in a Roman prison and writes, “I implore Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind...” then appeals to the others, “...help these women who labored with me...” (Philippians 4:2)

What did that *blockage* in their hearts come from? Was it a disagreement over how to serve? Was it simply a personality difference? Did they lose their zeal to reach out to unbelievers? Did they cease ministering to new ones?—beginning instead to focus on faults?

We are not told, but can we not relate to having issues with one another? “I prefer it done this way. She is concerned it won’t work unless it’s done the way she sees.” And when we serve together, do

these differences not pop up? I confess to being humbled many times after focussing on *my way* or *my opinion*.

Demas is another example of a *blockage* producing much damage. In Paul's epistle to the Colossians 4:14, he is mentioned as being with him in the first Roman imprisonment. In the letter to Philippians 1:24 this brother is referred to as a "fellow laborer." Yet sadly, about four years later during Paul's second imprisonment he writes to Timothy "Demas has forsaken me...having loved this present age." (2 Timothy 4:10)

Again we are not told the details leading up to his decision to leave. Did the price seem too high? Certainly Paul's impending execution was a graphic example of the cost for following Christ. To flee to this *present age* would have been tempting.

All these scriptures are written for our teaching, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness that we may be complete...fully equipped for every good work. We can be warned and helped through these failures, for we face the same temptations.

Precious ones, when the Holy Spirit makes us aware of some issue in our heart blocking fellowship with another believer, let's pray we will humble ourselves and remove the blockage by doing whatever He directs.



44. Little Things

I don't usually pay a lot of attention to dreams because in most cases they are simply a haphazard replay of the previous day. However, just prior to waking one morning my dream was rather vivid...and convicting.

Apparently I was meeting with some believers to enjoy fellowship in a rented facility. After finishing our time together we were to clean up; including washing the floor. When time came to do that particular task I, with a rather strong opinion announced, "It's not dirty, let's just leave it, for those instructions were actually the 'letter of the law.'" Others with me said little but I was bothered in my conscience. After some delay I asked for a mop and proceeded to clean the floor. Even though there were very few obvious dirt stains, while cleaning I experienced a humbling, a breaking of my natural opinion.

After rising and getting into the Word I was reminded that our Lord is looking for faithfulness in the little things. Matthew 25:21 says "Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a *few things*, I will make you ruler over many things." It seems He has

given us abilities, gifts, and assignments throughout our life and is pleased when we are faithful with them...even the minor ones. He is so pleased with that response from His servants that He promises a position of ruling when He returns.

There is also a principle brought out in Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much...” That portion may be referring to use of earthly wealth, but the application can be made to faithfulness in all the details of life—details such as washing a floor when asked. When we co-operate with the grace God supplies, we are then able to follow Him and grow into maturity as Christians. This prepares us for future positions of authority. Conversely, when we simply dig in our heels and cling to our opinions; our natural ways, we actually hinder the process of becoming more like our Master. If we would continue with a refusal to humble ourselves and yield to the tasks He sets out for us, we are in danger of missing what we all desire to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

May we earnestly pray for and encourage each other while we are here. Any faithfulness—even in the little things, will be worth it all when we see Him.



45. Learning to Serve

Training my younger sister on her first day in the tiny restaurant stands out vividly in my mind. After *my trainee* had successfully prepared and served several milkshakes we overheard customers remark, “These are very unusual tasting ‘chocolate’ shakes.”

Suddenly flipping off the milkshake machine, the container with all its contents landed with a splash on the floor. What a mess! Bending down for closer inspection we noticed among the splattered milk and chocolate ice cream a *dark red* mound of... “What is *that*?” Looking together at a pile of *quivering jelly* my sister and I burst out giggling at the now-solved mystery of her strange tasting *chocolate* shakes.

Successful serving takes practice, a fact I had already learned after spilling hot tea on a very startled customer the week before; but we persevered and eventually became adept at our job.

I have learned over the decades that serving others is supremely fulfilling! It truly is “more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) As Paul wrote so long ago, “For you brethren have been

called to liberty...an opportunity...to serve one another.”
(Galatians 5:13)

Perhaps the Lord is asking you to serve in a new way or in a task uncomfortable to you. I have discovered that our Lord is very faithful to supply what we need, to follow through with what He is asking. On the other side of “new or uncomfortable” is a big blessing! We may feel like the boy who gave his few fish to the Lord but his tiny offering in the hand of the Saviour produced miraculous results.

Perhaps few if any will know how we obeyed, but our Lord does and He will bless not only in this life, but even more importantly, in the next life also!

So—don’t be discouraged if some task looks like a failure. We are being trained by the perfect Trainer, and He will be our help.



46. More Precious Than Gold

People afflicted with *gold fever* often persevere under the harshest of conditions. They may invest all they have to discover that precious metal. Today in Canada's five main gold mines, gold fever appears to be more controlled. However, in one year those few mines produced over *64 tonnes of gold*, accounting for over 10 billion dollars of income! That is a huge sum of money but what detailed process is needed to produce pure gold!

Deposits must first be discovered, then analyzed after samples are drilled. Preparations for the mine and necessary buildings must be erected, then the raw gold ore must be refined by crushing and placing in extreme heat to remove other minerals and foreign elements. This involves a long process and careful work.

Apparently in Canada, 50% of the gold is transformed into jewellery, while about 30% is purchased in the form of bars, coins, or wafers—treasured by those who own it. In God's eyes, however, there is something more valuable, more of a treasure than pure gold! What is that?!

According to 1 Peter 1:6, 7 the answer is *faith*...more specifically "*your faith*." Those verses say, "...you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of *your faith, being much more precious than gold...though* it is tested by fire...may be found at the revelation of Jesus Christ." These words indicate that various trials—

even fiery ones are used to do the refining work in our hearts—work which is intended to remove impurities there.

Gold in the Bible is a picture of divine life. When we receive the Saviour we receive a deposit of gold—His life. Just as earthly gold must be refined, so must we.

When we hold fast to the Lord during life's testing fires faith can grow; such that our Lord Jesus will find precious faith remaining when He returns. And that is more valuable than earthly gold, for it will last for eternity—in other words forever.

Malachi 3:2,3 says our Lord is "...like a refiner's fire...He will purify {His people}, purge them as gold and silver." Hebrews 12:29 says, "God is a consuming fire."

When we treasure His words as Psalm 19 says, we are warned and will receive great reward, one "...more precious than gold, than much pure gold?"

Psalm 45, writing of the future Bride of the King, describes her clothing as being "woven with gold"—surely a picture of a faithful follower allowing Christ to make His home in her heart.

Some of that we will experience now, but most will be paid forward into the next age. Considering that, let's be encouraged to continue trusting, even when in the trials—not with uncontrolled gold fever, but with endurance and a willingness to co-operate with His golden life within us.



47. Misguided Optimism

We often hear the cheerful expression, "It's all good!" or as in the picture, "So far, so good."

That may sound lovely but in many cases, as in the young man falling through the air the statement is not reality! Life on planet earth is not "all good."

Evil, harmful actions are carried out each day, yet many times guilty ones appear to be prospering. For them it does indeed seem to be "so far, so good." They may be thinking, "The Lord does not see..." (Psalm 94:7) but that is deception for Scripture states, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." (Proverbs 15:3)

Over the past decades those of us in the baby boomer category have witnessed drastic changes in society's behavior. Various life styles which once caused shame are now openly promoted as good—to the extent that those who object are labelled as intolerant or hateful. Family units are increasingly broken down, leaving many without

hope and therefore vulnerable to addictions and depression. Even more dismal though, is the warning; “It is appointed to man to die once and after this the judgment.” The Good News Translation says, *“Everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God.”* (Hebrews 9:27) That sounds ominous!

Is there any good news? Any sure hope? Yes, for Romans 8:28 is also true. “All things work together for good to those who love God...” Even though harmful trials may come our way; even though we may be crushed by our failures or those of others; as we choose to draw close to our Saviour, He will work something good out of each thing. We may not see all the promised good until we are with Him. But one day we surely will!

As our lives progress, let’s encourage one another to love the One who is praying for and loving us, and in that way we will “shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” (Philippians 2:15)

All those in deception will fall, for they are building their house on the sand and no matter how proudly or optimistically words are now spoken—“great will be the fall of it.”

As we persevere, others will be drawn to the One who is able to keep each of us from falling, and they too can be rescued from misguided optimism.



48. Will I Take the Cup?

There's a song many of us love to sing, "I'll take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." I've enjoyed singing it so many times but recently had the new thought, *Not everything in this cup is pleasing to me.*

All I had previously considered was salvation through the cross of Christ and how wonderful that new life is in Him! That's a delightful cup for each of us. But *salvation* in the Bible is not usually referring to the new birth, the process of being "born again." The word in Hebrew, and in Greek (*soteria*) refers to "being delivered, made whole," As a new believer I had no idea how necessary it was to be transformed, renewed in my thinking.

Most new Christians have no understanding that trials will be used to conform us to the image of Christ—the image we are predestined to bear. No idea that cup we were enjoying so much actually contains many trials which will usher us into more of our eternal destiny... that of being like our Lord.

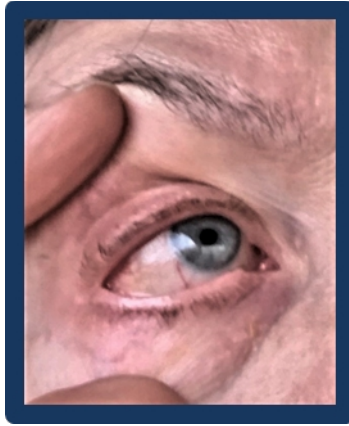
As I reflect back to the decades behind me I see so clearly now. "In faithfulness He afflicted me," and "Before I was afflicted I went astray." (Psalm 119:67, 75) Throughout my life my heavenly Father has been training me. His hand has been upon me, even when I did

not recognize it...even when I resisted, complained, and even angrily rebelled. He in faithfulness never lifted His hand from me and oh, how I praise Him for that now! It was in faithfulness He did it. It was with an eternal view He has been training me the way I should go.

I have far fewer years ahead than I have behind me, and oh how I wish I had seen this more clearly when younger. Thankfully I do see it now. Psalm 116:15 says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” Physical death yes, but also the death which comes when I agree to take the cup He gives me—the one which also contains the trials which bring me sorrow and pain. There’s another song we used to sing:

“Life is full of opportunities, ordered by the Father’s hand we see,
Everything’s the best that it can be. So let’s take Christ. “

Yes, let’s take the supply that our dear Saviour so graciously gives to us, for that also is continuously found in His marvellous cup. In doing so He is loosing our bonds, and setting us free so we can offer Him the sacrifice of praise.



49. The Dreaded Speck

Recently I became painfully aware of a “speck.” After cutting down some burdock plants full of dried burrs, a tiny barbed piece was blown into my eye and imbedded itself under my eyelid. As the picture reveals, a minute item can cause a lot of irritation.

Most of us have read about the difference between a *speck* and the *plank* in the eye from Luke 6:41, 42 “Why do you look at the *speck* in your brother’s eye, but not perceive *the plank* in your own? First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will clearly see to remove the speck that is in your brother’s.”

Realizing I would need help to have it removed, very early on a Monday morning my husband kindly drove me to the urgent care center for eye problems.

The first doctor entered and without clear explanation began to roughly grasp the eyelid, while firmly instructing me to, “Hold still.” From his impatient attitude one wonders if he had a *plank* in his own eye—perhaps one of opinion and negative attitude. In any case, minutes after his clumsy attempts he rather unpleasantly implied I

was uncooperative and perhaps there was nothing imbedded anyway. He would send me to another doctor.

Less than two hours later that next visit transpired, and this time the second physician, accustomed to treating children, (even elderly ones) gently and kindly explained what he would do. The result? I was able to be still and allow him to expose the speck which was then removed with very minimal discomfort—and extremely grateful relief on my part!

How simple for any of us to become afflicted with and aware of a *troublesome speck*—but soon realize help is needed to have it removed. May we learn to become like the second doctor, for a speck can become a dangerous issue if left unchecked.

How many times I have been similar to the first “helper,” with a plank of unchecked opinions or negative attitudes in my own eye? Our Lord Jesus is able to remove any such plank, then equip us to gently help another remove a speck as the second doctor, in kindness did for me.

50. Measuring Increases the Flow

In the beginning there was and in the end there is...a river. “A river flowed out from Eden...” (Genesis 2:10) “And He showed me a river of water of life...proceeding out of the throne of God...” (Revelation 22:1)

Throughout the whole Bible we get glimpses of this river. Ezekiel, in his vision saw it in detail. In chapter 47, water was flowing out from God’s house and a Man appeared with a measuring reed in His hand. After measuring *He led* Ezekiel through water to the ankles. He measured twice more and each time *led* the prophet through; water to the knees and then to the loins. The fourth measuring found the man of God in *water he could not pass through*; “...water to swim in, a river that could not be crossed.” The Man brought the prophet back to the river bank, but went on to explain. “This water flows...when it flows into the Dead Sea, the water of the sea is healed...and every place where the river goes shall live...”

Measuring can be a type of testing or judging, and we know this occurs in our life as Christians. Each time in this passage, it says, “He led me through.” Yes, we will be tested in this life, and the degrees of testing may become such that we can no longer walk through, but notice; each time the prophet was measured, *the Lord led him through*. He has promised never to leave or forsake us. Even during a grievous trial He is there; ready to walk with us through that water. Each time we allow Him to lead, more of His life can fill us with living water. And what does the living water do? It brings life where ever it goes!

In John 7, after people had been feasting for seven days, Jesus stood and cried out saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me...out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”

As vessels containing His life, we now have the privilege of bringing His water where ever we go. I have heard something repeated several times. “After meeting with you believers, I went home glowing; happy.” Haven’t each of us experienced being energized, encouraged with a healing adjustment in our soul after meeting with fellow believers? This is very real—living water can flow when we gather in our homes or in a meeting with many or with few. This is our portion dear ones

As God’s people sang so long ago, let’s join them in singing, “Spring up, O well...”and allow that river within us to flow.



51. Our Journey

What an endless variety of journeys we take in this life, and how various the modes of travel. In earliest days walking was the way to go. Then donkeys, camels, horses and buggies were used to carry travellers. Our world expanded. Boats were added, then trains, cars and planes...one mode increasingly faster than the other.

Today, the most common way of journeying is the automobile...and what a variety we have to choose from! Many times during our extremely frigid winter days my husband and I rejoice in our comfortable heated seats. We love the air conditioning on hot summer days, and the great economy of a hybrid vehicle. We feel so blessed!

In contrast, I'm reminded of wagon trains transporting early American settlers across vast,



barely inhabited lands and at times treacherous terrains and extreme weather conditions. Many of them never saw their loved ones in the east again. Missionaries once travelled by ships to foreign, dangerous places; paying at times with their lives, bringing the gospel to those who had never heard.

Consider a camel trip taken by Rebecca, from Ur of Chaldees to the land of Canaan so many years ago. This would have taken approximately six months; much of it through dusty desert sands and the searing heat of desert sun. None of these earlier travellers had the comforts we now enjoy, but most of them arrived at their destinations.

In Rebecca's case we know she did. (Genesis 24)

I'm sure the long difficult trip was made more pleasant by her thoughts of this wonderful man she would marry. She had already experienced some of his riches, in the form of jewellery given to her. Possibly Eliezer answered many of her questions about Isaac, adding to her excitement, and giving her a more complete picture of what to expect. She, like the other travellers mentioned, had left her family behind to follow this call on her life.

Little did she know her name and some details of her life would be recorded in the Scriptures—her failures and her successes. Little do we know what is being recorded in our lives by our heavenly Father. We do know (like Rebecca) that we have tasted some of the riches of the Son, and we know He has promised to be with every step of our journey—in comfort and in difficulty.

When we reach our final destination we will see Him as He is! What a hope we have!



52. A Complete Picture

Have you ever put a wrong piece in the puzzle you're making? It's the right color, and seems to fit, but...something's not right. The adjoining pieces don't lock in properly, and until you discover exactly which piece is in the wrong position you are stuck.

It occurred to me that "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) may be like that.

Among many values of repeatedly reading the Bible, one is the blessing of discovering how the pieces fit together. When that happens, you can experience an "Aha" moment of revelation.

There's a saying among those who study the Bible: "Never establish a doctrine on one verse." Likewise, you can't successfully put a puzzle together unless each piece is in their proper spot. To force one to fit will not only ruin the piece, but will prevent the picture from forming clearly.

There's a warning in Scripture about something like that. "...some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable *wrest*, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own

destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16) (KJV) Other versions use the words, ‘*twist, distort, misunderstand, misinterpret.*’ A dictionary definition for ‘wrest’ is *to forcibly pull something, wrench, or pluck.*

Anyone wishing to *force* a particular teaching can do this to a verse, but doing so can lead to destruction—real damage to themselves, but also to others they may influence.

All Scripture is inspired by God, so we need to take heed to it all. We are told at the beginning of 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study, be diligent to show yourselves approved to God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed...” If hours of labor are required to put together a 1,000 piece manmade puzzle, consider how much diligence may be required to find Scripture pieces which truly fit together. Unlike a machine-made puzzle, for God’s pictures we need the addition of the Holy Spirit to grant us revelation.

I love those little “Aha” moments now but one day the complete picture will be made clear, and what a day, glorious day that will be!!

