

Uniting Principles

(Measured by Asking,
What Would Jesus Do?)



BY TIMOTHY B. CASSIDY

Please visit www.UnitingPrinciples.org

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

Timothy B. Cassidy's Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?")

"Tim Cassidy's book Uniting Principles is practical theology at its best. Driving down Rt. 78, discussing interactions with housing developers, reflecting on loved ones after a funeral...Tim shows the value of seeing daily life through a Christ-colored lens. All of this earth belongs to God, and every moment has the potential to put God on display. Tim's commitment to worship and growth in Christian community, coupled with his understanding that God is on display 24/7, makes this a book of significant importance. Take and read and imagine sharing your own life's journey as a testament to the work of Jesus Christ. I am grateful that the Reformed Church of Highland Park is one of the homes where Tim's theology has developed and grown. The words on these pages will help his pastor grow too!"

Rev. Seth Kaper-Dale

The Reformed Church of Highland Park, Highland Park, NJ

"Uniting Principles delivers a timely encouragement that is surprisingly rare and often only perceived through reflection looking back at one's life, like a mountain climber unable to take in the splendid beauty of the sights surrounding him while straining for the next hand hold. It's only in pausing from the climbing can the majestic views of creation be taken into account. The encouragement is what unites all of the principles together. The spiritual sacrifice of good deeds done in love for others and offered to the Lord mentioned in Hebrews 13 are pleasing to God and bring deep, abiding joy to those presenting these offerings to the Lord. May we all be inspired by Tim's book to pray the boldest and simple prayer, "Here am I, use me Lord!"

Pastor Scott Zbylot

Silver Springs Baptist Church, Magnolia, TX

"I have known Timothy for more than a decade! His passion for The Saviour and The Church is undeniable. His writings are a wonderful expression of the journey of faith that he and all of us should pursue. His documentation is not for the faint of heart but IS for those who do not want their heart to faint!"

Pastor C. K. Chitty (Retired)

The Wesleyan Church, Fishers, IN

"I feel that there can be no better time for a book like this. I think it speaks to the need for our society as a whole to look at the issues of uniting everyone from every race and religious background as one. It opens our eyes to see as Christ would see it and gives understanding to those who lack wisdom. It is impactful, informative, and authentic, and truly shines a light on what our world needs right now. Thanks for taking action!"

Esther Brant, Healthcare Manager and Woman of God, Maryland

"The book Uniting Principles is a story of a continuing journey of a committed Christian who is seeking God and growing in the knowledge and understanding of God's work in his life. You'll find scriptures throughout the book that provide a biblical context for many important topics. He candidly shares his struggles in a way many of us can relate to as well as his passion for helping others. Tim reassures us about the hand of God on the lives of each of His children. Despite those struggles, we can not only survive with the help of God, but also emerge as better people as we learn from these experiences and challenge ourselves to let the love of God shine through us."

Stanley Robinson, Princeton MBA, Business Advisor and Man of God, New Jersey

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Author's Mission and Purpose

While Tim Cassidy's overall mission in life is to serve the Lord in as many ways as possible, his purpose for writing and publishing *Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?")* is as follows:

- Bring people of faith or not together, i.e. unite in understanding and acting as the Lord intends, namely loving all as brothers and sisters and showing kindness, grace, mercy, compassion and service in everyday life.
- In his challenging journey, Tim hopes to show those who have fallen away from their Christian faith that all is possible in Him.
- Tim hopes to challenge good Christians to be great Christians in serving and giving beyond the norm.
- Tim hopes to inspire those of no faith or alternative faiths to understand (and act upon) core principles that we predominately share with all good people.

Dedication

In so many ways, I am my mother's son. My mother, Leona Schofield, or Nana Lee, as she was commonly called, instilled in me core values that are aligned with my increasing faith and related beliefs as a born again Christian later in life. I am open and communicative, for better or worse, because of Mom. I see silver linings because of her. In time, I became centered and thankful to the Lord for every moment, including every twist and turn that has brought me to where I am today. This includes understanding my father's flaws and his resulting inability to love, which, I would come to learn, was not of my making.

I was blessed with loving aunts and uncles, as well as many positive influences along the way. I was blessed with great “adopted” aunts and uncles that helped shape me in my youth. The summer with Judge Herrigel when I turned 14 influenced me in many positive ways.

There are so many people that have impacted my life over generations and influenced my paths, both for better or worse. There are no regrets, only thankfulness in every interaction that led to the Lord and serving in sometimes important ways. These people include longtime friends, from Dave to Bob to Arnie, and more recent friends, from Earleen to Kathy to Kurt. My later in life influences in the Lord include so many from RCHP including Pastor Seth, Pastor Franco, Neil, my Jamaican Mom Clara and do many other pastors and believers from so many places.

My thankfulness extends to others who worked and believed in me and my work, from Gene to Marty to John to Rudy to Trish. Special thanks are due to Pam, my prior assistant who became my scribe when I was on the road and transcribed my dictations for many chapters in the book. She could never quite retire. It is great to have people around us that believe in us because they have a great sense and/or understanding of who we are.

I am so thankful for my children Megan, Cait and Chris, and my grands Olivia, Audrey, Lucas, Clara and George. While it is not godly to be boastful or prideful, I am proud of my children and grands when they do things that are Right and Righteous. My Mom told me she loved me every day, but only occasionally did she say she was proud of me. I am once again my mother's son, as I do the same with mine. I recently had a text conversation with the father of a friend of Chris's after a decade plus since we talked who said so absolutely "Your son is a great guy." He is, balanced, kind and loving, and I am proud. There are so many times I feel proud of Cait as a mother and as a person, as I get to see her in her maternal role more often than her left coast sister.

My children and grandchildren inspire me in so many ways. I hope to be a worthy example for them in the day-to-day, in the writing and publication of this book, and in reaching out to other people. May I leave this world as a little better place. My prayers and ultimate dedication are for all children, and the children to come. May they live in a world that is radically more loving, where we unite for their benefit.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Testimonies	
Testimony (Spoken in Church in 2013 on Personal and Professional Test)	4
Personal and Professional Test	5
Personal and Professional Test - In a New Light.....	10
Constant Prayers	12
Unbridled Joy	13
The Presence of God and His Disciples.....	14
Neil – An Inquisitive Approach to Life and Love	15
Pastor Franco...A Beacon of Light.....	17
Clara, Our Second Mother	18
Asking What Jesus Would Do in the Principles of Life, Living and Loving	
Acting Godly or Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"	21
Care Beliefs and Values Intertwined (Uniting Principles).....	21
Core Beliefs Measured in Actions	22
Loving All Brothers and Sisters	24
Blessed Mirror(s).....	25
Progress is a Process (in Life and in Him)	27
The New Testament in Historical Context.....	27
Compassion and Kindness–A Common Thread for Humanity.....	29
Jesus Questioned and So Should We	31
Right and Righteous	32
Loving in the Name of the Lord.....	33
A Childlike Approach to Prayer and Loving	34
Absolute Forgiveness	35
By Grace We Have Been Saved Through Faith.....	36
The Gift of Mercy	37
Selflessness.....	38
Servitude...Being a Servant (Doing All We Can Do)	39
Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness	40
Rewording	41
Success is... ..	42
The Only Answer is His Answer.....	43
Come as You Are	43
Faithful to God’s Laws.....	44
We Must Be the Light for Others.....	45
COVID-19: Lamenting Vs. an Urge for Christian Rationalism.....	45

Humble Yet Confident	47
From Effort to His Love (2 Peter 1:5-7)	49
The Power of the Holy Spirit Within	49
Salvation (Being Saved).....	50
Biblical Interpretations.....	50
Ask to Receive	52
Entitlement	52
Judgement.....	53
Better or Worse Approaches to Living and Loving	53
What is Truth?.....	54
Truth Requires Context	55
Reaching to Reach Others.....	56
The Pursuit of Wisdom	57
A Prayer for Time (For Jean and I).....	58
A Do Over God	59
Not God Fearing.....	60
There is no Testimony Without Tests	60
Avoid Justification Even if We Are Justified.....	61
The Long Game Requires Perseverance	62
We Reap What We Sow.....	63
The Right Direction is His Direction	63
Walk the Lord's Walk	64
Studying the Word	65
Teaching with His Intent.....	66
Praying and Acting Purposely.....	66
Abilities, Value and Availability.....	67
The Six Components of a Balanced Life	67
People are Inherently Good and Bad.....	68
Choose Life AND Doing for Those Most in Need	69
Common Sense Q & A.....	71
Greed and Ego Run Amok	72
End of Centuries.....	73

Sermon and Church Inspired Topics

Matthew 10:34-39 and Serving the Lord First.....	77
Matthew 5:4-6 and Righteousness Redefined	78
Four Actions to Spread Your Faith	79
Psalms 102 and Beyond Coincidences	80
The Message of Hope is Why I am a Christian.....	80
Rooted in Him and Choices	81
The Value of Obedience.....	82
Repentance to God, Others and Ourselves.....	84
Saving Private Ryan and Revelations	85
Paul and Timothy...Lessons in Discipleship	86
Creating Disciples	87

The Need for Cleansing is Ongoing.....	87
Being Contrite is a Blessing	88
Macedonia Baptist Church and the Promise	89
Epiphanies	90
Prayer is Integral for Consideration(s) and Decision(s).....	91
The Real Prosperity Message.....	91
The Last Are First	92
Relative Blessings to Miracles	93
Seize the Opportunity for Racial Redemption	94
We are Accountable for Our Actions and Words	96
Be Courageous...Trust in the Lord.....	97
Racing Against the Unknown Clock.....	97

Healing & Communication Compilation

Find Truths to Get to Healing	101
The Pursuit of Healing	101
The Communication Collection	103
Expectation of the Lord in Communication.....	105
Trust in Transparency	106
Collaboration.....	107
Older Communication Expressions.....	108
Busy.....	108
Closure in Communication	109
Deflection.....	109
COPAETAF	111

Personal Stories and Reflections

Alcoholism in the Family	113
Lee Bradley's and the Pieta	117
Leona, Mom and Nana...Giving Everlasting	120
My Father and Mable Mercer	122
Aunts and Uncles.....	124
A Five Year Old's View of Heaven	127
Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Early Influence.....	129
Seven Positive Principles.....	130
Uncomfortable to Be Comfortable	133
Two Visions of America.....	134
An Artistic Existence.....	136
The Judge.....	138
Black Irish and St. Patrick's Day.....	138
A Promise is a Promise.....	139
From Three Strikes to Foul Tips.....	141
A Burning Love.....	142
Practicing Catholic	142

Living Live Like a Pond.....	143
A Newfound Appreciation for Mothers.....	143
A Hard Working Mom	144
Family Summer Vacation 1999.....	145
Silence Game.....	147
Twisters	147
Paul (and Tim) Used Scribes	148
Basketball Dinner and When Boys Cry.....	149
Champion.....	152
Dollar Bill and Team Ball	153
The Mick.....	155
The Unexplained and the Supernatural are God Given Too	157
Thanks...Giving 2002 and 2019.....	159
Oh Lord. Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood.....	160
Prayers	161
Prose and Poems.....	163
Random Observations from All Over the Map	169

Introduction

Uniting Principles is divided into multiple sections, beginning with Testimonies and including the lead chapter, *Personal and Professional Test*. The sections which follow are, second, Asking What Jesus Would Do in the Principles of Life, and third, Living and Loving and Sermon and Church Inspired Topics. In these sections, I cover a very broad spectrum of topics in approximately 100 sometimes interrelated chapters that are important in our lives from a biblical perspective or according to his interpretation thereof.

Topics range from fairly obvious ones, like loving, mercy, grace, kindness, and forgiveness, to somewhat obscure ones. Some subjects stir controversy, like Choose Life AND Doing for Others Most in Need, which discusses how to virtually eliminate abortion. Many will be uncomfortable with the Common Sense Q&A chapter, which asserts that capitalism fuels Greed and Ego Run Amok. Some of my Christian friends weren't fond of the chapter Compassion and Kindness - A Common Thread for Humanity, but love and kindness have no boundaries to me.

Thereafter, a Healing and Communication compilation is followed by Personal Stories, which provides context of who I once was, am today, and will become in my increasing faith.

There are dates on each predominately short chapter for frame of reference on the topic. At times, the dates enable the reader to follow my pathway for betterment in the Lord. We are never too old to yearn to learn and learn in Him.

I tried to maintain an anti-political stance, believing that both major parties in the U.S. political system are predominately ungodly. Their divisiveness and acrimony are a sign of end of days, or what I refer to as End of Centuries.

Like most any published works, there are usually a limited number of key themes or conclusions, and it is not uncommon to have one central them. That is true for *Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?")*, as there are several core and therefore repeated messages:

- In all interactions or actions of relative substance, we must channel the Lord, and ask what would Jesus do.
- In all interactions, we must show kindness, mercy, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and most of all, love.
- We must be selfless servants, doing all we can for those most in need.

Like most of us, I am concerned that so much in this world doesn't seem Godly and I thus embrace the Lord and await His second coming. That said, reconciling the readiness of all of my children and grandchildren is another matter.

Over millennia, the world has had periods of time, often lasting many decades, in which societies and their people strayed far from the Lord as hope for humanity waned. In the ebb and flow of our collective being, things got better in the past downtimes for most people, and they prayerfully will again. Uniting in so many ways is a big part of that betterment for the sake of all our children and the generations to follow.

No matter our chosen (or unchosen) faith, we have dramatically more in common than we do differences. Core Beliefs and Values, including loving one another, and acting on that love by *Loving All Brothers and Sisters* is needed. We must act with kindness, compassion, mercy and more, all shared by all good people and major religions. That includes loving our families and wanting a stable, better and kinder world.

Common sense and hopeful societal logic (if there are such a thing) tell us we must unite in so many ways to have a bright future or even a future at all. For believers and nonbelievers alike, the book offers myriad uniting solutions.

Testimonies

Testimony

Introduction

There are three chapters on a single topic to follow, centered on patient and caregiver advocacy in California that was only possible with the Lord when I (through my solely owned company) operated a large skilled nursing facility in California from 2001 to 2003 that was the center point for that advocacy. All things happen in God's time, including the many "tests" that schooled me before for the seemingly ultimate test and testimony of and in the Lord.

The initial Testimony I spoke in church in fall 2013 summarizes the *Personal and Professional Test* and *Personal and Professional Test – In a New Light*, longer stories and reflections on that time and topic that follow in this short compilation. While the longer related chapter may be too technical or industry-specific for many, professionals who understand the healthcare system or for those that get through it, the result is hopeful context as to how all things are possible when the Lord is with us.

By the time I wrote *Personal and Professional Test – Test in a New Light*, I knew that standing up and doing for others with those He placed at my side was the greatest Blessing in my life, yet still on an equal basis with the Blessings of my children and grandchildren. Bolstered by these Blessings, I also believe that the Lord may grant other Blessings of comparable substance including this book and serving in other ways.

According to others, the results mentioned in the *Personal and Professional Test* have benefited likely millions of nursing home residents and staff by now. I pray for thankfulness and humbleness as I make that statement.

Testimony (Spoken in Church in 2013 on *Personal and Professional Test*)

Below is the testimony I gave to the RCHP congregation in 2013. I am very thankful that Pastor Seth allowed me to speak this testimony. My being open on what occurred years before in this testimony led to added testimonies and to *Uniting Principles*.

Hi RCHP Family,

My name is Tim Cassidy. I've been attending RCHP since June 2012. Like many, my faith in the Lord has been a process over time. I was always a believer, just not nearly as thankful and understanding of the Lord's presence as I have become over the last decade. I believe that sometimes growth happens through testing. It happened that way for me from 2001 to 2003.

I must admit that while I was going through the trial there were a lot of "Why me?" It took years to fully understand that I was Blessed by the Lord to have an incredible opportunity to give back despite the hardship that included losing a year of work and getting involved in legal battles on behalf of others. Now in my nightly prayers include, "Thank you Lord for

granting me the opportunity to give back in magnificent ways,” and I sometimes add, “Please give me another opportunity to be in the right place and time to do it again, Lord.”

In the summer of 2001, I leased the largest nursing home in the San Francisco Bay Area. I was living in New Jersey and had been in the business before. Before I started, the nursing home was threatened for closure by the Department of Health because of the prior operator’s bad care track record. However, it was an important facility because it accepted twice as many Medicaid patients as any other facility in three counties. After taking over we discovered that the problems were worse than thought. The prior operator had altered patient records and abuse was not abuse, infections were not infections and falls were not falls. Worse yet, many Department of Health employees were well aware of much of this, yet we had the obligation to report it to that organization that looked the other way for many years. Within months, my lender couldn’t handle the mess and we were forced into bankruptcy.

Eventually I was left with choices. I could walk away and let the facility with 600 residents and employees close its doors. The residents could be relocated two hours away—away from family, friends and doctors and I could end my financial suffering. Or I could fight on behalf of these residents, work to keep the place open and get a second mortgage on my home to fund the fight. A state association; my right-hand man and friend, Gene; an esteemed congresswoman and a resident’s daughter joined forces and fought with me. Finally, the state allowed the transfer of operations to a local hospital and other precedents were set that helped others. Many good things were generated from media coverage. Some people told me our work started the snowball rolling down the hill and within two years caregiver wages statewide were increased 16% through Medicaid contributions for long term care.

I was always thankful for the eventual victory, but my family suffered financially and otherwise. I struggled as to why God let this happen to me. It wasn’t until I started to embrace the Lord and returned to the church that I started to realize what a Blessing it had been to be a major part of something so important for those who were suffering.

What is so special about this church family is that giving back is what everybody tries to do—and I’ve learned to be thankful for the chance I had to give back, and to be thankful for future chances I’ll have, despite the costs. As of today, I haven’t missed a Sunday at church in 143 straight weeks. I’m committed to being thankful and looking for ways to serve.

Thank you.

October 2013

Personal and Professional Test

In a nutshell, my solely owned company operated the largest for-profit nursing home in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2001 into 2003. When the “opportunity” was introduced to me, the nursing home was extremely troubled and threatened with closure by the Department of Health Services (“DHS”) because of problems with patient care by the prior manager/operator. That operator was one of the largest nursing home chains in the nation to go bankrupt in the years

before I took it over. Medicare cuts, rising liability and health insurance costs and reduced Medicaid reimbursement had rocked the industry. This particular chain and its lead principles were being pursued by the Attorney General for statewide patient care issues and this particular facility was their focal point.

The year before my company took over operations there was a once-in-a-century heat wave in the Bay Area. The building did not have fans, let alone air conditioning. The temperature on the third floor reached 103 degrees. Over thirty residents were dehydrated and hospitalized. Three residents died. Thereafter the prior operator installed over 250 fans. Before assuming operations on a long-term lease, I negotiated with the landlord to have air conditioning installed, which required complicated state approvals with mechanical and structural upgrades that would take 18-24 months or more. Even installing portable window air conditioning units would take six to nine months to be approved by the state.

Based on my positive track record in nursing home operations and turnaround situations in other states, DHS licensing was received, financing negotiated, prior operator transfer issues were seemingly addressed, and a long-term lease was obtained concurrent with the sale of the building to a new landlord. In mid-2001 the operation was assumed with 300+ full and part-time employees. My company borrowed over \$2,000,000 with my personal guaranties to obtain the required operating capital.

Within a couple of months, I learned from the administrator (a former regional manager of 20 plus facilities who was very seasoned and savvy) who replaced the prior administrator my company inherited that there were patient care issues ten times worse than disclosed by the prior operator and not part of the DHS public record.

In addition, three disclosed litigations from the heatwave and poor care by the prior operator became more than ten settled litigations nine months after I assumed operations. This made the business uninsurable since there was a two-year history (or look back) that included the prior operator. As a result, our insurance was not renewed.

Employee theft and dishonesty were rampant on all levels. Prior departmental managers endorsed this, and supplies disappeared out the back door. Since several managers also owned group homes with up to six patients, they surely never needed to purchase items like food, diapers or other supplies. We tried correcting the behavior through the Director of Medical Supplies who established new policies and her tires were slashed in the parking garage...twice.

The worst of the issues was that under the direction of the prior management, the administrator we replaced within weeks and the Director of Nursing soon thereafter, over 80% of the nurses we inherited collaborated to hide shortfalls in care or applied warped definitions for patient care not found in any textbook. Staff routinely redefined or ignored the nature of wounds, infections, falls and patient abuse far astray from regulations or ethics, let alone common sense or decency. As a result, a substantial majority of care staff were fired and replaced with agency staff (namely temporary staff at wages that were double regular wages) until permanent employees could be hired. Improving resident care was hampered by the union sometimes slow to agree to such extensive staff removal even with patient abuse by so many nursing aides.

We were legally and ethically obligated to report patient abuse as well as other issues of substance to DHS, which was a double-edged sword since they looked the other way in their so-called detailed patient survey completed only weeks prior to my assuming operations. Prior to assuming operations and the substantial responsibilities for so many, they knew that if these issues were disclosed, my company wouldn't sign the financial guarantees for operating capital needed. Finally, the facility was the largest provider (281 beds) in the area and the DHS knew it was needed.

The regional DHS office was very close to the nursing home, with many of the DHS inspectors being former employees and friends of the nurses we fired for incompetence. Plus, we learned from several sources that the Director of Nursing we inherited and soon replaced had an ongoing affair with the head of the local DHS office.

I was faced with a war I seemingly couldn't win with the DHS. Reporting the undisclosed issues meant admitting their failure when performing inspections and not doing their job. They were the only agency to go to and we went back and forth on reinspection after reinspection and reported issues to those that had looked the other way on the same issue months and years before. Of course, they wouldn't throw themselves on a sword for their jobs and pensions.

While dealings with the DHS were becoming seemingly hopeless, my primary lender, a Fortune 100 Company, stopped funding our \$1.5M revolving credit line secured by our receivables. After getting the news that a \$550K draw on that credit line was not being paid from the lender on Friday, October 18, 2002, corporate bankruptcy was filed on Monday the 21st, the next business day. I notified the DHS they would have to cover the \$375K payroll by Wednesday morning. The DHS was forced to quickly step in and cover all expenses.

Soon thereafter there was a Superior Court action with the DHS and the Attorney General's office in another court jurisdiction, with a settlement and a Receiver appointed to take over management. Several lawyers and one of the state associations confirmed that once a Receiver was appointed, no California nursing home had ever stayed open for the benefit of residents or the community and residents would have to be relocated. In addition, the state didn't mandate operators have a minimum number of MediCal beds like other in states versus private pay beds for those more well-off. Plus, we were the largest facility in an extended area with double the MediCal patients.

The maneuvering in bankruptcy court by adversaries thereafter was constant. At least every few weeks I appeared in court with the Receiver's counsel, along with the Attorney General's office on behalf of the DHS, counsel for the former operator and their two subsidiaries, the pharmacy and therapy providers, the landlord's counsel, the trustee counsel, and a handful of the large creditor's counsel that were clearly a "who's who" of California law firms specializing in bankruptcy filings as regular attendees. The Receiver's counsel was an international firm with over 1,000 attorneys and their fees and other costs were paid by the State unlike my tiny by comparison costs. Another firm was one the largest law firms in California and the attorney for a mid-sized firm that appeared in court was a regular golfing partner with the judge in a separate case with the two vendors. All of these so-called esteemed professionals were working against

me, my company, caregivers whose jobs were at risk and the nursing home residents care in court appearance after court appearance to close the building.

All this legal wrangling was pitted against the one-man firm my company hired because he was affordable, allowed me to speak for the company in court appearances and do court preparatory work. Gene was my in-house counsel and became my right and sometimes my left hand. Our adversaries outspent us by an estimated 100-200:1. I paid for some secretarial and paralegal support and spent 1,500 hours of my time, in addition to the time for Gene and my expenses flying back and forth across the county that were not reimbursed.

In all of the hearings, the adversaries (with the exception of one creditor and including the landlord) wanted the building closed. The now 200 or so residents would have to be relocated mostly out of the Bay Area away from families and their current healthcare providers. They were collectively the largest and most medically complex group of MediCal patients in a nursing home in the region. Other nursing homes routinely declined admission for the complex and it was more costly to care for patients that we housed regularly in our facility. Hence, there was literally nowhere locally for these frail patients to go to but 90 minutes or more away near San Jose or the Central Valley that was well away from friends and family.

The DHS and the Receiver on their behalf had stopped new admissions since they wanted the building closed as they were funding \$300,000 a month or more in shortfalls to keep the facility open. Fewer beds after the closure of this much larger than average sized facility would result in a decrease in their budget during another budget crunch year and seniors were a low priority on the state level let alone other levels. I referred to the Receiver as a “DHS puppet” in court documents and testimony because his counsel argued on behalf of the DHS on this and other matters. That included many hearings and motion after motion related to attempts to close the facility starting with converting to a Chapter 7 liquidation in bankruptcy court.

We eventually found a solution for the residents, future residents and families. Ownership could be transferred to a hospital and be eligible for MediCal reimbursement of over \$320 per day versus the \$140 per day per patient we received to care for sicker than average patients and pay well-deserved employee wages. Initially there was limited hospital interest. The best suited hospital wasn’t interested as resident families picketed and lobbied them for months.

When trying to secure closure of the building in court, the DHS kept claiming hospitals were not eligible for the program. Based on their regulations, the DHS wasn’t technically wrong. Gene found case law on patient rights over creditors in bankruptcy court filings and the very fair judge gave us time hearing after hearing and motion after motion on behalf of the residents despite the laws, regulations and so many deep pockets stacked against us.

Fortunately, the local (and still serving in 2023) Congresswoman stepped up, as did the CEO of one of the two state associations for nursing homes and the daughter of a resident receiving complex care who rallied families. All were aligned by the Lord as I later came to understand. Even after her mother died of natural causes, that resident’s daughter continued to fight full time as her law firm granted her paid time off for advocacy work that included organizing resident’s families to picket the hospital almost daily for many months. Gene hung in there with me as he

had before and we both worked without pay for almost a year preparing, filing and defending motion after motion. San Francisco and other network news stations covered the story often as did the *San Francisco Chronicle* and local newspapers.

Towards the end of this process and a gubernatorial election looming and the State Attorney General on behalf of DHS threatening unfounded personal actions against me to make me go away, I met an attorney with reams of evidence for a prepaid three-hour review. He knew the Governor well. At the end of his review, I advised that would go public with the many issues with DHS. That information would have included the release of a very extensive third-party nursing study that compared the DHS inspections over two years with many of the same patients that they falsely blamed on us. That would also prove without question they were aware of the depth of the substantive patient care issues before I assumed operations. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post* and NBC News were waiting in the wings for this information if we couldn't settle, I advised.

After nearly a year of concurrently fighting in court and in the local and statewide court of public opinion, various precedents were set when the largest hospital-owned nursing facility (other than a couple of very long-time grandfathered nonprofit facilities) was established.

All this occurred as negotiations dragged on with the hospital that didn't want to operate a nursing home, but public pressure won out. Precedents were set on many levels, including the state funding the facility to stay open while this transpired to the tune of over \$3,000,000, a claim for payment that we were told was four times the highest ever in bankruptcy court for a nursing home in the state. Plus, that claim was converted to an unsecured claim in bankruptcy proceedings based on our extensive exhibits.

Then there was over \$10M a year added to the state budget based on the care available for high acuity, long term care patients in this new much needed facility. Thereafter, low-income residents with a variety of complex care needs were admitted to a facility with higher reimbursement that translated to better higher-level care. Caregivers received higher wages and patients got better care.

As a result, many thousands of residents have benefited to this day because of the one large facility my company owned. Similar numbers of families have also benefited over the years. More so, state policy was changed based on those precedents. Other facilities with low reimbursement for MediCal patients in challenging high cost of living and wage areas were able to become hospital subsidiaries. I understand that in some cases, DHS went out of their way afterwards to help correct issues and keep needed facilities open unlike before.

Conclusion

There were a handful of people that were critical to making the change happen. First, there was the daughter of a patient who was paralyzed – someone no nursing home would admit, but we did. She organized resident family members to picket the hospital when they didn't want to and did so for many months rain or shine. There was the head of one the state associations that rallied the press in our favor, including coverage in major newspapers, NBC News and ABC News.

There was the local (and still current) Congresswoman who lobbied the county and state on our resident's behalf. And there was the SEIU, the union that justly championed the need for higher wages for nurse's aides – an issue we had raised in the need for the hospital to take over with their higher pay scale.

There was Gene, my company's long-standing in-house counsel, who worked side by side with me to file motion after motion for us to gain time for the settlement to happen. There was my friend, Vicki, someone who will always have a special place in my heart. She listened to my turmoil as I went through this, she understood, she respected my choices and often soothed my anguish. There was the bankruptcy judge who listened to our David versus a team of Goliath's arguments even if it was a reach. He knew that patients deserved that slim opportunity that turned into reality and gave us the time against a "who's who" of attorney's arguing against us.

Three substantial "tests" over eight years before this time set the stage for me to fight the fight and make the right decisions. The first was when my company managed a 300+ bed Assisted Living facility in New York in the mid-90's after appointment by a bankruptcy court only to find out the owner compromised patient care. I forfeited my company's management contract by whistle blowing on the owner with the New York Department of Health. While we lost the contract, the owner received \$18,000 a month less that went to better patient care because of my team and my actions. The second was litigation involving a partner in a nursing home where he wanted to cut staffing and compromise patient care. The third was a partnership dispute that forced a bankruptcy action to a settlement in a healthcare facility that I operated. I prevailed in all of these because the cause was right. Each was more challenging than the next as I became battle tested. It helped prepare me.

While my solely owned facility was at the initial forefront, efforts of associations and unions played key roles in publicizing inequities in the MediCal system, particularly the low wages for most employees and nurse's aides. In 2006, that momentum resulted in a revamped Medicaid reimbursement system as the state added double-digit expense reimbursement increases in MediCal rates in one year as long as the majority was "passed through" for employee wages and benefits that was verified in Cost Reports. Our actions with the State and DHS became like pushing a small snowball down a hill in 2002-2003 to a bigger and bigger snowball in those increased 2006 and thereafter statewide wages that positively impact patient care.

Personally, I had to reorganize (a polite way of saying corporate and then personal bankruptcy due to the personal guarantees on millions of dollars). However, I worked for a few years as a consultant in California to do more good work but on a smaller scale.

Written 2006, with Epilogue July 4, 2007, and proofed March 2023

Personal and Professional Test – In a New Light

I did not see the "tests" in a "new light" until years later after the text occurred when I met a reporter/author for social causes and injustices. She wrote a book about her time spent in Rwanda during the genocide that was somewhat chronicled by the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. If she

could write about that experience that resulted in her loss of faith, conversely, I could write about the “test” that led to my emerging faith in the Lord.

I had long considered myself a Christian, and for the decade plus from 1991 to 2003 that I managed and owned primarily skilled nursing facilities, I believed I was doing God’s work. I embraced giving back by co-founding a nonprofit organization in 1993 that provides healthcare to poor seniors, added activities for nursing home residents and matches kids and seniors for intergenerational programs. While I was not born again until 2003 and a churchgoer until 2006, I knew I had an obligation to give back.

I prayed almost every day, and more so when I was professionally and financially tested late in 1997 to 1999 when my ability to provide for my children was put into jeopardy, or emotionally tested when my beloved Mom got sick in 2002 and died in 2003. Nonetheless, I prayed but didn’t consistently walk the prayer walk more than talk, namely embracing and expressing my faith. That changed in 2006 after meeting that reporter and praying deeper on what was right...and righteous.

During the challenging times before, I asked myself many times “Why me?” and “Why must I, let alone my children, suffer when I made sacrifices for the right reasons?” I wondered and asked the Lord so many ways and times why I wasn’t rewarded but suffered instead. By attending church and more so in gaining insight from the Bible, I have come to understand that I have been rewarded in the opportunity to give and giving. I came to understand the suffering of the Lord’s disciples in the Bible, and that doing good work despite hardship may be a bigger Blessing.

When I was amid the “test” I didn’t see (as I did later) that I was God’s messenger. I didn’t realize this was God’s plan for me and others that only He could have placed around me to accomplish His will. With that understanding the many “Why me?” questions changed to prayers of thanks. The resulting prayer for me daily for many years thereafter was “Thank you Lord for the great opportunity in my life to give back to so many in a substantial way.” It was like the morning fog lifting, seeing the emerging light of the sun in the distance and finally the light on a crystal-clear, cloudless day. I was truly Blessed!

Many Blessings are clear, including my children and their health and happiness that I pray and give thanks for every day, the opportunities granted for me to give back in an extraordinary way and others that are the absolutes. But there is more to come. I now regularly pray for God to grant me opportunities to give back in extraordinary ways in His name. I now know that great things will occur born of great effort in His name, and in increased faith in yourself and those around you because the Lord is with you. I believe I am not done and that He is not done with me as a vessel to achieve for all the righteous reasons.

October 4, 2011

Constant Prayers

My mother taught me a single prayer to say as a child, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Through much of my early life, I recited that prayer every day but rarely did so as I got older. As I became a born again Christian, my prayers began to increase in volume and in content, often praying for someone I knew or met in addition to the constant prayers I say before going to sleep.

There are only two prayers that I have said every night for years upon years. The first is to thank the Lord for everything He has granted and will grant me for right and righteous reasons, which I expand in different ways depending on the day. The second constant prayer is “Lord, please allow my children to be healthy and happy.” I added Olivia after I became a grandfather, then added other all other grands thereafter.

The second prayer was answered this past Thursday evening when my son was in two car accidents less than ninety minutes apart but was not injured in either. As someone who drives a lot, I know my life is in the Lord’s hands on highways more than most every other moment of the day. I may not be the best driver, but my son has been worse in his young life. As an example, over the last decade there were not a handful of things that my ex-wife and I could agree on, but we did agree that Chris would not have a car when he went off to Elmira College.

This early evening, he left home on a winding country road he lives on and made a left onto a road where traffic is routinely going 60mph. He says he did not see the car behind the car approaching him from the right and so was hit broadside at 50mph. His older car was totaled and all he said was that he had a very minor headache.

He met the tow truck driver at the scene within 90 minutes. He was a passenger in the tow truck with his car being pulled behind it as they pulled out of the same spot where Chris had just been hit, as the tow truck was struck at nearly 50mph by a pickup truck. This initially caused a fire for both the truck that hit them and the tow truck as it was hit near the gas tank. Other than a bit of a sore neck and a headache that passed, Chris was fine after experiencing two high speed accidents within a 90-minute period.

My hope is that this becomes a wakeup call for him and perhaps others that know him that the Lord is indeed at work, and the Lord was looking out for him. Perhaps Chris will be a little more careful going forward as his father’s years of prayers were answered. As I said to him the following day, “I hope you got down on your knees, prayed hard and thanked the Lord that you are safe.” He acknowledged that he has, and hopeful that is the case.

My prayers of thanks for my children’s health and happiness will be a constant for me until the day I die.

December 20, 2015

Unbridled Joy

Most of us find great joy in receiving gifts, and most of us also find great joy in giving. As children (at least in our memories) and adults, we experienced much happiness from receiving all those Christmas or birthday gifts. We should all ask, “What brought me the greatest joy when I was a child? As a young adult? After I became a parent?” As most of us age, giving provides greater joy than receiving.

While receiving has higher value than giving, we are not acting as the Lord wishes. He expects servitude (*Servitude...Being a Servant (Doing All We Can Do)*) and so much more. I am thankful for many things, including being thankful for not allowing my earthly father to be my primary example of how to live or act, but rather by being my mother’s son, a mother that lived the principle of *Giving is Everlasting*.

As I have expressed in many ways, including in *Right and Righteous* as a measuring stick of living a loving and proactive life, we must act godly or righteous. Righteousness is connected to joy. In Proverbs 10:28 (NIV): “The prospects of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.”

Many things bring us joy in life measured either in fleeting moments or over weeks or years. Few occurrences seem like “unbridled joy.” For most of us, children, grandchildren, and other family members are a source of unbridled joy.

So many of us have ups and downs from bad health, financial strains or issues with family and relationships. Sometimes challenges can last for years, yet we still must remain focused on thankfulness as we act with purpose and expect His opportunities for us. Perseverance is usually measured in extended time. The added layers of happiness that occur when emerging from challenging times seem magnified and are an example of unbridled joy.

As is still the case today, my solely owned company appears on internet searches for consideration of Senior Living development or operations. Pastor Guthrie found me in 2013. Sometimes we serve as advisors and sometimes we serve in a development capacity, like we did for Pastor Guthrie’s church. They had acquired about a 20-acre parcel from a bank in northeast Knoxville after the Great Recession. Their hopes and plans were to relocate to a to-be-built church after selling a portion of the property. The proceeds would be used as a down payment of sorts to finance the new church. My company contracted to buy a portion of the site for Senior Living development. Due diligence was conducted on many levels to present an opportunity for an owner and operator that was later identified.

After my company’s due diligence on varied levels, the managing partner of a prospective owner, two principals of a nationwide operator, Pastor Guthrie, a church deacon who was a well-learned attorney and I met at Calhoun’s on the River in Knoxville. After exchanging pleasantries, the owner and I discussed the purchase price my company would accept for the Senior Living portion of the site. I was well armed and blessed because one of the three largest, well known, and respected industry appraisers told me about a site very close by that they had recently appraised which wasn’t quite as desirable. I advised that if the potential owner of a completed

care facility would match that per unit price, we could come to terms. They quickly agreed and we had a wonderful dinner.

As Pastor Guthrie and I walked to the car after dinner I said, “We have to change our Agreement based on my Agreement on the price with them.”

He asked “Why?” since he and the church were already satisfied that God was at work in the price we agreed to originally. I told him that after expenses were capped at a flat rate, I would also share equally in my company’s development fees and profits above the agreed upon purchase price. We quickly agreed. The closing didn’t occur as soon as the owner/developer had hoped. The church needed to get financing for the new church and build a shared access road and bring in utilities to close on the Senior Living portion of the site with their new church financing concurrently.

The closing occurred in early June 2015. My company’s development fee and profits were substantial even after donating approximately 45% of our gross fees that allowed the church to build several additional classrooms. I was also able to pay bonuses to key team members, help my in-house counsel’s mother and his church. (See *The Presence of God and His Disciples* about Gene.) I went on a great vacation with my best friend since our freshman year of high school including baseball games at six different major league stadiums, even more museums and doing a rather good job of posing as foodies. I was able to help my church and my kids. I was further reaffirmed in Him.

What joy I felt in knowing I helped plant a new church on that sunny day when the closing occurred! All this led to a seemingly rare stretch of comingled unbridled joy for me, but surely for many others including church members that were so involved.

Joy begets joy, and unbridled joy can beget unbridled joy. I pray the Lord continues to use me for His purposes and puts me in positions that result in joy and unbridled joy for many.

September 2015; April 29, 2020; and February 25, 2023

The Presence of God and His Disciples

People understand that God is with us when we struggle and are thankful to the Lord when there are positives in our lives, yet we can forget that He is with us in every moment. We need occasional reminders that God’s presence is all around us in the wonders of nature and in the goodness within people we interact with in the day to day.

Our most positive and hopefully long-lasting influences come from love, and for me that is centered on my late mother. God is visibly present in my life, and so is my mother. At times, their presence coincides. When I am kind, my mother and the Lord are there. When I am loving, my mother and the Lord are there. When I am demanding for the right reasons, she and the Lord are there as well. In ways she was my mother and His disciple rolled into one.

While I have had professional successes in the past, nothing compares to the opportunity presented by the Lord to give back referenced in *Personal and Professional Test* that couldn't have occurred without many disciples by my side. The late Gene Bradfield worked for and with me for almost 17 years. All that resulted during the "test" would not have been possible without Gene. He was a well-educated attorney, but wore other hats including financial analysis, human resources, and 401K management when we operated nursing homes. At a too young 54, he passed away just before Christmas, 2012. Since he was teenager, he had been a very involved member of his Assembly of God church. He was kind, soft spoken, a very large man that literally couldn't hurt a fly. He was a man of God.

Gene had such great faith and expectation that man is inherently good that he sometimes struggled to prepare the best language in contracts in anticipation of the opposite. Hence, I often got a second opinion on documents he prepared, and that was a great ethical balance to me. For years, including when we took on the State of California on behalf of nursing home residents and caregivers, he was intermittently my left and right hand. We both sacrificed and didn't get paid during that time of "tests" as we both somehow knew we were being chosen for a greater purpose. We never discussed that, but we knew even as he knew better than me at the time.

Gene was also very smart – straight A's from high school through law school. I learned from him in so many ways. He softened my sometimes-edgy side, and he helped me learn how to act let alone write better in business and personal pursuits.

I recently prepared two complicated legal documents. I sent them to an attorney for review. He had two small comments, saying how great they were a couple times, seemingly embarrassed that he did not have more to say. After this call I thought of Gene and how he was still with me in my work, not just his legal knowledge and teaching as such but also his kindness and grace in interactions with others. These were things I greatly underappreciated when he was physically present.

I continue to thank the Lord for Gene's presence in my life in the past and in the present. He was a disciple in so many ways that I came to understand more in time from a biblical standpoint.

Look around you. Seek and find His disciples. Grow in following the Lord but also following and walking side by side with those who reach to help others as the Lord intends. Be a doer for others as the Lord intends, namely His among His disciples today and tomorrow.

April 23, 2013, June 2019, and February 2023

Neil – An Inquisitive Approach to Life and Love

In my deep and thoughtful conversations with Neil Selden, he always asked seemingly simple yet difficult questions. During a prayer vigil after he passed away and an amazing service, it became crystal clear that Neil was like that with all around him. That was part of who he was as a psychotherapist, but more so, it was ingrained in his loving nature.

A couple long conversations with Neil was about the oldest of my three children and our difficult and complex relationship concluded with Neil's advice to "just love her." He often said "love radically" or something comparable. Radical love was often the central theme of his solution...after listening intently. If only it was that simple was something like that I thought after our chats.

Neil's questions were direct, unexpected, inquisitive, and sometimes put us on the spot. As one of our members said during Neil's service, he made her uneasy. I can relate as I also make people uneasy at times with my questions or statements...but with hopeful good intent like Neil. *Yes, a Better or Worse Approach to Loving and Living.*

When healing in ways as our intent, it is our God-given responsibility to be inquisitive and ask hard questions for all the right and measured in the Lord righteous reasons. This is one of three things that I learned or had reinforced in my time with Neil. The second thing is to just love, and the third is to be open and embrace an interfaith approach to doing good work and God's work.

As a congregation, we surely have heard similar expressions from Pastors Seth and Stephanie. I suspect their growth as pastors was greatly influenced by Neil in that that we are all God's children, and that all religions share messages of love, fellowship, grace and forgiveness.

The last time I met with Neil and Lee in their home was to discuss an idea for RCHP as the "The Little Church That Could," an idea Neil embraced so I bought the related domain names. We often discussed how *Core Principles and Beliefs* are shared among different faiths. We met just weeks before most in church (and I) knew how ill he was.

He believed that if a proposed website and related efforts could do that and find one great leader of any faith that mobilizes other great leaders let alone many, it will have been worthy. He said something like "We do not have to reach a million people, but shouldn't we make the effort to reach and influence just one who does reach many millions." Neil often spoke of our pastors as great leaders, but also the depth of activists that became leaders at RCHP.

As time as passed since his passing, I find myself seeking out strangers in daily life and asking simple questions like "Are you truly well today." Sometimes I'll ask, "Can I ask you a serious question," often getting a sheepish response back in a yes or OK before then asking, "Are you well today." That often leads to people being open when not well leading to a comforting discussion to follow.

I will keep asking those I know and strangers alike the sometime uncomfortable questions born of radical love, to challenge myself to be more inquisitive and "channel Neil" with healing and hopeful empowerment in mind.

May 2015 and proofed February 2023

Pastor Franco...A Beacon of Light

Preface

Franco had been a ten-year survivor of pancreatic cancer before it came back, and then passed away on March 6, 2019, at the age of 52. Less than 2% survive more than a few years from this deadliest of cancers. After his initial recovery, he went from a survivor to a “thrivor” and took his faith further into action. His left arm tattoo of “Wage Hope” was his way of living in the love of the Lord. He waged hope through his volunteer work at church, with cancer organizations and with anyone he met. Knowing life was precious, he retired early and went back to school for his degree to become Pastor Franco.

Beacon of Light

We can never understand why the Lord takes those from their family and friends too young and that are so rooted in sharing His love like Franco. When you speak with many people about the Lord, you can hear their passion, and sometimes you see their passion yet no one I ever met wore their love of the Lord like a glow of thankfulness on their face like Franco.

Pastor Franco was so thankful for every moment of every day since beating pancreatic cancer for that decade. He was a good man who just kept getting better and better in the Lord’s love, mercy, and kindness. He cherished every moment and day with his family, in fellowship and discipleship. As part of God’s plan, his early retirement to become “Pastor Franco” gave him added time with Jacquelyn, Ana and Noah before he passed.

As part of his growing pastoral duties, Pastor Seth asked Franco to reach out to me as sort of my dedicated church pastor, and we met first met as such for coffee at the local Dunkin Donuts. During the 90 minutes or so we were there, we chatted one-on-one for 15 minutes at best as others needed Franco’s gentle intervention. That included a couple Rutgers students and then an older Jewish couple close by that heard RCHP mentioned and knew of the work it did for all no matter your faith or lack of it. He was always at peace and thankful, and that was like a beacon to those around him.

The Service and Further Reflections

Franco’s service was held at the Voorhees Chapel on the Douglas College campus of Rutgers University as it was much bigger than our church’s sanctuary. It was full, with approximately 650 people there as testimony to the life of a man that touched so many. I considered him a friend, yet he was not a close friend like many others there. That said, his nature as a beacon of light in the Lord made you feel like he *was* a close friend.

Franco’s brother read John 14:1-4, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where am going.”

This passage was the centerpiece of Pastor Seth's memorial sermon including: "Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Pastor Seth mentioned he sat with Franco every day for the last weeks of his life after the cancer returned so aggressively. He read scripture every visit. During his last week on earth, Franco asked him to read from his favorite Gospel, so Seth read all of Matthew.

I pray that I can find a greater light and channel Franco at times as I try to channel Neil in inquisitive ways or Gene in his Godly approach to ethics, law, and life. I know without any doubt that Franco's light in the Lord lives on in ways with so many people.

March 6-9th and October 2019

Clara, Our Second Mother

Clara O'Neill passed away April 4th, 2020. In the time of COVID-19, her service was held via Zoom. She and I met at RCHP. Many there found a second Mom or Mother life me while others like Justan found a "granny" and called her that. I called her my Jamaican Mom early on, but very soon she became just Mother. Just like with your own Mom, you instantly gravitated to her loving smile, hug or kiss on the cheek.

I had taken her home after service a couple of dozen times over the years. That became more challenging as she progressed from a walker to a wheelchair. I (like so many) recall getting her a plate of food or two when we had a gathering over a meal. If you got to serve her during a Mother's Day dinner, you felt an added sense of joy.

I'll always remember her singing How Great Though Art in church. She didn't have to hit every note to make you feel the beauty measured in loving the Lord in her expression. On the online service, Selma mentioned she thought of Neil, Franco and Clara in heaven singing together.

There were many things expressed today about her that resonated, like how spontaneous she was, or how she could move from talking back and forth into song or prayer. Pastor Stephanie recalled her conversations with Clara during which she carried on a concurrent conversation with her and Lord at the same time. We all loved her spontaneity. I enjoyed making up jokes to hear her laugh, which came so easily and joyfully. I remember reminding her my last name was Cassidy because my grandfather was Irish and then saying her O'Neill is an Irish name too. "Did you have an Irish grandfather too," I asked and prompted instant hearty laughs. I remember telling her I liked to write before asking if the great writer and playwright Eugene O'Neill was her relative. She always knew I was kidding, and she was an amazing audience.

We spoke of our families early on after meeting and that became a constant, including almost every time I took her home from church. I remember an early conversation about our children's

names, and how happy she was (and I) when we discovered that both of our babies (as in youngest) were named Christopher. We each asked about our Christopher's thereafter.

I remember telling Clara that my mom was raised by her Uncle George and Aunt Clara. I remember a conversation sometime after that when I told her my oldest daughter Megan had her first child, (my second grandchild at that point} and she named her Clara because that name was shared by the families of both her husband Bill and her. She was so happy and joyous of that personal connection. We were now even more family.

I remember telling her we can't be prideful as Christians, but we can be proud of our children. She completely agreed and praised the Lord. Her natural love touched so many, and that love had a magnifying effect. Like rings, ripples or small waves around a stone thrown in a pond, they then touched and reached so many others.

Just days ago, I thought about what was missing from not going to service during a pandemic. I missed the love at the passing of the peace and otherwise. I thought how I still missed Neil's dancing or his simple yet inquisitive questions, Pastor Franco's smile and glow in his face due to his love of the Lord. I miss Clara's love and joy. Like my mother, she was a mother and grandmother to so many in addition to her own family. Like so many, I am so Blessed Clara's loving was a small but substantial part of my life.

April 6 and April 17, 2020

**Asking What Jesus Would Do
in the Principles
of Life, Living and Loving**

Acting Godly or Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"

There are hundreds or more likely thousands of examples of how Jesus acted with people when here on earth. The New Testament is more historical in nature and centered on Jesus when He walked with his Disciples here on earth. Therefore, books in the Bible written by those disciples and those that lived in those times like Paul should frame our answers when we ask ourselves "What Would Jesus Do?" as a guide in how to act Godly in our personal interactions. Here are a few examples of how Jesus interacted with others:

- Giving back is expected of us and evident from so much scripture. From Peter 1:7 "And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." From Timothy 6:18 "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." There is so much in that single verse, including rich in good works and ready to distribute or do for others.
- We much *Reach to Reach Others* and stand up for those in most need as Jesus did. From Proverbs 31:8-9 "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." While judgement is reserved for God, we are being told here to "judge righteously" as in speak out and seek change as if we were acting Godly.
- From 1 John 4:8, "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." God asks us to love and be compassionate to all people of all faiths, to *Love All Brothers and Sisters*. Love is all inclusive as in "anyone" in this verse, as in love thy enemies let alone those that are perceived as different than us in some way.
- From Timothy 6:11 "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." In this passage, as men and woman of God, we are taught to seek righteousness, not just what is right for us as individuals. We are told to pursue godliness, namely act like Jesus!

When considering small interactions to big decisions in our lives, we would be wise to ask, "What Would Jesus Do?" When we act Godly with those close to us, strangers, and all others in between, we must do so humbly, with His love, kindness, compassion, grace, and mercy.

January 7, 2016, June 2019, and March 14, 2021

Core Beliefs and Values Intertwined (Uniting Principles)

Core beliefs and values to follow are prayerfully centered on what is first and foremost righteous. Christians, those of other faiths and atheists to agnostics share different beliefs yet often share very similar values. When I speak of values, I am referring to the ethics and morals that are taught to us predominantly by our parents but also by others, including grandparents, family, friends, and other special people in our life. My mother was the major influence in my childhood. Therefore, much or most of what are my core values was at her core, including loving, communicating openly and giving.

My mother regularly took me to church until I was six years old before we moved to Mendham. Thereafter, we went no more than a handful of times together for the rest of our lives. Mom lived a life that had many ups and downs, some that would be deemed the opposite of Godly. Nonetheless, while she didn't always live a life based on what was right and righteous, she taught me values based on what was right and righteous.

Other than being loving, primary values instilled in me by my mother included being respectful, particularly to those that earn respect, kindness, compassion and more. Plus, I believe in *Seven Positive Principles* mainly because of my mother, and I surely know that *A Promise Is a Promise* because of her. She taught me that we must be honorable in our commitments and communicate openly.

However, my mother did not teach me or show me much on forgiveness, humbleness, and patience. Hence, that has taken more work and effort to evolve in who I became, let alone who I hope to be. As referenced in *Stories of Forgiveness*, I did not truly learn how to forgive for many decades. Through evolution in my faith and beliefs, I've learned the value proposition in forgiveness is centered in both psychology and the Lord.

Loving All Brothers and Sisters is a core value to me as well as something my mother installed, with *Martin Luther King Jr. an Early Influence* an example. Core values are mostly taught and learned rather than ingrained in our DNA or in our God given make up. We can and should grow, evolve, and improve in acting on these core values that are almost always shared by Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and followers of other religions. See *Compassion and Kindness – A Common Thread for Humanity*.

Collectively, when most of us remember and act on valued and beliefs taught by our parents and/or our religions, then kindness, compassion, mercy, grace, and love will be the uniting principles that heal a broken world.

July 21, 2019, March 8, 2020, and March 14, 2021

Core Beliefs Measured in Actions

As mentioned in the *New Testament to Historical Context*, most of the New Testament authors either walked with Jesus or were directly influenced by those that did walk with Jesus. Therefore, when I look at my core beliefs and what I see as the most important beliefs for Christians, I am framed by the New Testament.

There are so many beliefs that are biblical. it would take volumes from teams of scholars to address. While the Apostle's Creed, written in 390 AD says so much concisely, many Christians widely believe it is incomplete in many ways. Nonetheless, regular reading and reminders are worthy, so it is below:



Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell,

The third day he rose again from the dead
He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,
Amen

* That is, the true Christian church of all times and all places

For me, the Apostle's Creed includes much that is the core of Christian beliefs, but not necessarily how we must act as Christians when we believe. With that in mind and a hopeful soul, I offer my humble opinion on *Core Beliefs Measured in Actions* below.

Core Beliefs Measured in Actions

We have a loving God, a God that expects us to love our neighbor and even love our enemies.
We must be loving to all brothers and sisters.

We have a forgiving God who sent His only son to us "...to free us from every kind of sin."
(Titus 2:14)
We must be forgiving with others without exceptions.

We have a merciful God as in Psalms 25:10, "All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth..."
We must be reciprocal with others as in 2 Samuel 22:26, "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful."

We have a God of grace as in 2 Corinthians 12:19, "...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
No matter our physical or spiritual frailties, we are whole and well.

We have a compassionate God as in Isaiah 63:7, "I will tell of the kindness of the Lord....according to his compassion and many kindnesses."
Kindness begets kindness, as in Luke 6:31, "And as you wish others would do for you, so do to them."

We have a God that expects us to be patient with one another as in Ephesians 4:2, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

May each one of us find the patience He desires.

We have a God that expects us to be humble as in Micah 6:8, “To act justly and to love mercy and with walk humbly with your God.”

We must keep our egos in check and understand what is truly important to be fully humble.

The Lord expects us to be givers as in Luke 6:30, “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap. For with the measure, you use it will be measured back to you.”

Giving and giving back also brings happiness and joy.

We have a God that instills strength and is uplifting as in Joshua 1:9, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

We can rise from great depths with faith and without fear in Him.

We have a God that wants us to spread the word, as Mark 16:15 states, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

We must speak up for what is right and righteous in Him.

We have a God that rewards the doers as in James 1:23-25, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer...But the one who looks into perfect law, the law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

We must be persistently proactive to affect positive change.

We have a God that has expectations in us as Isaiah 1:17 states, “Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”

The Lord expects us to stand up for those in need.

We are saved by the blood of Jesus; still, while we must praise Him, we must honor Him in our actions as much or more than our words.

Christmas Morning, 2019, and edited January 28, 2020

Loving All Brothers and Sisters

From Matthew 12:37-40, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shall love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all law and the prophets.” The word “all” is used often in the Bible for emphasis. All means everyone.

From 1 John 4:20 ESV, “If anyone says I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he does not love his brother whom he has seen he cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Like “all,” the word “anyone” has no exceptions or is all inclusive.

When we are loving, we are both caring and purposeful in doing what we can do to help others and that means *Servitude...Being a Servant (Doing All We Can Do)*. It also means being very proactive to doing good works for those most in need. In the broken world and broken country, we live in, that means recognizing and addressing inequities and inequalities for people of color. Again, it is clearly Biblical that we must love all brothers and sisters and we must stand up for injustices.

Therefore, I care about young African American men and people of color who fill the prisons disproportionately. I care that women should be treated equally in earnings and in respect, with things needed to be done to achieve that. I care and know there is a need for quality and subsidized childcare. I care about the need for affordable housing. I care about available and affordable education for all. I care about healthcare access for all. I care about refugees and immigrants that have suffered and need mercy, grace, and love. I care about all those different than me, including those that choose committed partners differently than I do, or those that have very different beliefs.

When we say we *Love All Brothers and Sisters*, but do not act as such in volunteering or doing all brothers and sisters, are we *Walking the Lord’s Walk* or are we just a hypocrite talking the talk?

To walk the walk of loving all brothers and sisters, we must walk the walk in standing up in ways to change governmental policies from Federal to State to local branches to be better for all brothers and sisters in healthcare, housing, employment, education and more. We must stand up as individuals and in our churches. We must stand up in leading, organizing, educating and prompting others.

From Isaiah 1:17 (NIV), “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless, please the cause of the widow.” Yes, we must step up in voice and actions for justice and love for all brothers and sisters and for those that are most oppressed.

Drafted 2018 and finished January 19, 2020

Blessed Mirror(s)

The words “Blessing” and “Blessed” seem to be self-explanatory even for casual Christians or non-believers. However, according to Webster’s Dictionary, there are multiple definitions including “being held in reverence; honored and worshipped” and even “good fortune.” Most falsely associate the latter with money or the equivalent thereof, yet there are so many reasons we are fortunate. For someone struggling to pay bills that may be getting a new low paying job, an early or bigger tax refund that are a blessing. Is getting a huge check for the rich to just get richer a blessing? I think not, unless the recipient gives a huge portion if not all that money to those in need.

Common definitions of “blessing” include Dictionary.com definition of “God’s favor and protection,” with “favor” and “protection” common synonyms as well as a spot-on definition. We should see every moment as favor, protection, and blessings of the Lord in all aspects of our lives. Blessings come in all shapes and sizes as mentioned in *Relative Blessings to Miracles*.

Whether we know it or not, we may be lost, drowning, or just temporarily derailed in our lives and/or faith. In loving the Lord, we will likely benefit more from his love, mercy, forgiveness, compassion and more. That gives us hope, meaning and ability to persevere, all blessings upon blessings.

“Mirrors” can take on different meanings, but the most common and only definition as a noun in Dictionary.com is “a reflective surface, typically glass coated with a metal amalgam that reflects a clear image.” That is the literal definition of the mirror we look at every morning as we get ready for the day, but what is the figurative definition? Are we also a reflection of an image that is hazy or unclear at times because we have not been healed in needed ways and/or have not truly embraced what it means to be a person of faith?

When troubled, we are more likely not to look at ourselves (or others) straight in the eye or look in our mirror and ask hard questions, let alone answer them openly and honestly. The mirror can be kind or unkind when you look at yourself in a new light of transparency and in Him. Over time, when we gain trust in the Lord sometimes with the help of others, we can heal and learn to look at a literal mirror in a different light.

Healing means a *Better or Worse Approaches to Living Life*, including being open and honest in *Right and Righteous* communication with others. Plus, being honest with ourselves is never easy. From the extremes of those with low self-esteem to the egotistical, people tend to be misplaced in their view of themselves. When we are not honest with ourselves about who we are or in our abilities, we become unintentionally dishonest with others.

The inference in mirrors could also suggest things are being done “with smoke and mirrors.” In my business, that means being highly leveraged and managing my team and my time despite financial and geographic limitations. I am on God’s time after all. It also means money being managed tightly on projects and not wasted on idolatry. In the open expressions of abilities, wherewithal and faith, there is Trust in Transparency or a clear reflection in that mirror. Leading Webster’s definitions for transparency include frankness, honesty, clarity and visibility. All are worthy.

I am Blessed in being able to give back as mentioned in *Personal and Professional Test, Unbridled Joy* and otherwise. I am driven in doing for those most in need and for my family for *Right and Righteous* reasons. As a result, the mirror has become kinder and kinder even while the literal skin in which God has wrapped me within cracks and ages.

December 24, 2015, July 18, 2019, and March 2020

Progress is a Process (in Life and in Him)

In discussions with landowners and development partners about my work in senior housing development, I used a phrase “Progress is a process.” to describe the due diligence and process(es) leading into the approval or entitlement of a site. It also describes supporting and establishing that capital stack team so to speak (Operator and/or Manager, Builder, Development Partner, GP Equity, Equity Partner, and Construction Loan to Permanent Debt). While some concurrencies, much of this work happens sequentially. Hence, progress is a process!

So much of life in so many ways are a process or a series of processes of twists and turns and stops and starts. That includes plenty of ups and downs that can happen in clusters of great positives or the opposite.

We grow and sometimes gain different degrees of wisdom at different paces as well. Maturity has surely been a process for me, with spurts of progress and learning in general and in Him, as well as periods of time that were unfortunately too long a stop in the stop/starts of life. We gain maturity through the *Pursuit of Wisdom* in all aspects of our lives, hopefully including digging deeper to fulfill the Lord’s provided talents and His expectations in us.

Progress is not a steady line upwards but typically a series of ups and downs. Our lives can become a grind where so many are overworked to make ends meet and/or to accomplish worthy goals. Sometimes we must step back and reassess to step forward in our lives with adjusted priorities in work, family and serving.

When we are truly understanding and thankful to the Lord, we can find *Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness* even in the daily grind of our lives. There is an old saying, “stop and smell the roses.” Roses come in all shapes and colors, some worn and frayed but still full of fragrance and beauty. Many even press dead or dying flowers in books and create new beauty and peace.

As imperfect human beings, we go through ups and downs and times when our faith is tested in big and small ways. The journey is ever evolving, maybe more so when we are proactive in taking worthy chances. Eventually, progressing becomes a worthy and worthier process.

November 2, 2015, September 26, 2019, and March 20, 2021

The New Testament in Historical Context

The Four Evangelists are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew and John were also among the Twelve Disciples or Apostles of Jesus during His time on earth. The Synoptic Gospels refer to the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, speaking mostly of the same accounts from the life of Jesus with Matthew and John’s accounts usually from firsthand experiences as a “living history.”

Mark was a follower or disciple of Peter, so his accounts were surely framed by Peter’s accounts of the teachings of Jesus as one of the 12 chosen Apostles that literally walked with Jesus. From a blog dated August 22, 2018, by Jim Warner Wallace, “The repeated and unanimous testimony

of the early Church describes Mark's Gospel as an accurate record of Peter's teaching, captured faithfully by Mark acting as Peter's scribe. Like Peter (and modestly at times Tim), *Paul Uses Scribes*.

Luke was a close friend of Paul, the latter a principal author of the New Testament. Many accounts place Luke as a trusted follower of Paul day in and day out for two years. In the early days of the church, no one planted more churches than Paul. While not one of the Twelve Disciples, Paul wrote up to 13 books of the New Testament according to many sources. Hence, many consider Paul as the second most important entity after Jesus in the early growth of Christianity. Plus, he lived during Jesus's time on earth as well.

From *The Reason for God* from Pastor Tim Keller, "When they read Luke, which claims to be an eyewitness account (See Luke 1:1-4), they take it as history." Luke 1:1-4 (KJV) states,

1. Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
2. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word,
3. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write I unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
4. That thou mightiest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

History that passes down from one generation to another can lose some authenticity over time and many generations. Firsthand accounts like Luke's, when combined with so many other firsthand accounts, let alone many more secondhand accounts from the Disciples whose lived during the time Jesus lived on earth is the definition of "historical context."

Again, from Pastor Keller's book, *The Reason for God*. "In his landmark book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham marshals much historical evidence to demonstrate that at the time the gospels were written there were numerous living witnesses to Jesus' life and events. Indeed, the respected writer and scholar, Richard Bauckham, takes an added layer of scientific approaches in his consideration of historical context history and the resulting truths."

From www.coldcasechristianity.com on how ancient eyewitness testimony became the New Testament gospel record, "Unlike spontaneous, unprepared witnesses of a crime, the Disciples were desperately attentive to the words and actions of Jesus, and I imagine their attention to detail became even more focused with each miraculous event. For this reason, authors of the gospels became excellent eyewitnesses and recognized importance of their testimony very early." The Bible has many references to eyewitness testimonies, including the following:

- 1 Peter 5:1, "Therefore I exhort the elders which are among you, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed..."
- 2 Peter 1:16-17, "for we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made it known to you the power and coming of Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty..."

1 John 1:33 “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - and the life was manifested, and we have seen it and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us...”

Collectively, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and Peter are the primary authors of the New Testament. All of them, but particularly Paul, tell of eyewitness accounts from so many others.

Many, including Bauckham and the literary critic and esteemed author, C.S. Lewis, make a great case on the nature of many of the stories in the Bible, namely that they were not like fiction written at the time. Pastor Keller states about Lewis’ interpretation, “Lewis meant that ancient fiction was nothing like modern fiction. Modern fiction is realistic. It contains details and dialogue and reads like an eyewitness account. This generation of fiction, however, only developed within the past 300 years. In ancient times, romances, epics or legends were high and remote – details were sparse.” Of course, stories from the bible are the opposite as they are full of details.

Furthermore, as referenced in *The Reason for God* by Pastor Keller, “Richard Bauckham has compiled a great deal of research by psychologists on the marks of recollective memory. Recollective memory is selective – it fixes on unique and consequential events. It retains irrelevant details (as Lewis observes). It takes the limited vantage point of a participant rather than that of an omniscient narrator and shows signs of frequent rehearsal.”

Conclusion

Unlike the Old Testament where Jesus was prospective or so much relied on prophecy, the New Testament preserves the words of individuals who knew Jesus personally or who followed Him after His resurrection. Hence, the New Testament is the go-to resource to help us come closer to the Savior’s expectations in us as we gain understanding of His mortal ministry.

Again, the majority of the New Testament is written within the time (and context) of lived history in the time that Jesus walked the planet with his disciples, preached to so many more including large crowds, including as many as 5,000 or more at the Sermon on the Mount.

With so many witnesses from the time Jesus lived on earth with us and shortly thereafter, we can be affirmed and reaffirmed in the teachings of Jesus as we strive to *Act Godly...Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"*

July/August 2019 and November 10, 2019

Compassion and Kindness - A Common Thread for Humanity

Compassion and kindness are almost one and the same. Kindness and kind-heartedness are Merriam-Webster synonyms for compassion. Common synonyms and definitions from Dictionary.com and other sources include kind-heartedness, tender-heartedness, merciful,

benevolence and more. Clearly the definitions of compassion and kindness are entwined, yet in some ways compassion can be more than kindness as synonyms also include love, brotherly love, humanity, and humanness.

These two important words and traits are mostly interchangeable in the Bible. When Googling Bible verses, I often refer to OpenBible.info, a resource that ranks responses in polling that provides dozens of verses on both kindness and compassion, many of which overlap. For example, when searching “Bible Verses Kindness” and then “Bible Verses Compassion,” Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” was ranked first for both kindness and compassion. Colossians 3:12, “Put on them, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” is ranked second and fourth respectively. Clearly, most Christians see compassion and kindness as interchangeable or one and the same.

Again, humanity and brotherly love are synonyms for compassion. From John 4:19-20, “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who cannot love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” As Christians, we are expected to be kind, compassionate and *Love All Brothers and Sisters*. Yet does that make us unique in our faith versus others in their faith?

From the Jewish News of Northern California, <https://www.jweekly.com>, “In the very first chapter of the Torah, we find its famous teaching that humanity is made “in the divine image.” According to this Talmudic text, to be “in God’s image” means to act in the ways that God acts, and all the examples here are acts of caring and compassion.

According to one source in the Hindu religion, “For devotional traditions, compassion descends from above. The Lord is an Ocean of Compassion...” From www.hinduwebsite.com, “In Sanskrit, the equivalent of compassion is Karuna. Karuna is a virtuous feeling which is generated in the mellowness of the heart. God is considered in Hinduism as karunamayi, the very personification of compassion.”

From the *Khalee Times*, www.khaleejtimes.com, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, “The first of the Quran breathes the spirit of peace, it reads “In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.” Compassion is repeated in the Quran no less than 114 times. It shows the great importance Islam attaches to such values as mercy and compassion. One of God’s names, according to the Quran, is As-Salaam, which means peace. It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other...except for a small minority of extremists.

From the World Community for Christian Meditation, which also confirms the 114 mentions of compassion in the Quran, “At the heart of Muslim belief is the principle of tawhid or oneness. This oneness, or unity, has been described as that which dominates the mind in Islam, while the heart is intrinsically linked to the concept of compassion.” It quotes 2:62 from the Quran: “Truly, those that believe, and the Jews, and the Christians and Sabeans - Whosoever believes in God and the Day of Judgement and act virtuously will receive their reward from their Lord, no fear of grief will befall them.” Whosoever is certainly an all-inclusive word suggesting love for all brothers and sisters of all faiths.

In 1 Peter 3:8, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” Like so many other verses on so many important principles we are to follow, the source uses the word “all,” an all-inclusive word that likely includes everyone, not just Christians.

All religions share kindness and compassion as core beliefs and a valued part of shared our humanity. That means compassion for all, not just for our fellow believers. Sin, evil and bad people exist, but even in a world seemingly askew, there is far more love, compassion, and kindness as shared common ground.

January 4-5, 2020

Jesus Questioned and So Should We

From ChristianityToday.com, “Whether in a public gathering, a confrontation with his enemies, or a private conversation with his closest friends, Jesus consistently used questions to produce change and growth.” Scholars agree that Jesus asked many questions for many different reasons, including keeping people engaged, searching for truth, disciplining, teaching by seeking feedback and understanding what is important to God.

From a review of 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered by Martin B, Copenhaver, “Contrary to some common assumptions, Jesus is not the ultimate Answer Man, but more like the Great Questioner. In the Gospels Jesus asks many more questions than he answers. To be precise, Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 183 of which he only answers 3. Asking questions was central to Jesus’ life and teachings. In fact, for every question he answers directly he asks - literally - a hundred. Jesus is the Question considers the questions Jesus asks—what they tell us about Jesus and, more important, what our responses might say about what it means to follow Him. Through Jesus’ questions, he modeled the struggle, the wondering, the thinking it through that helps us draw closer to God and better understand, not just the answer, but ourselves, our process and ultimately why questions are among Jesus’ most profound gifts for a life of faith.”

Jesus was many things, including the greatest healer, but He was also the greatest teacher. He taught by actions as well as by questioning. Many of the questions Jesus asked required much study or are subject to many interpretations, yet most are clear like these:

- From Matthew 5:47, “And if you greet your brethren only, what is unusual about that? Do not unbelievers do the same?” as a reminder to *Love all Brothers and Sisters*.
- From Matthew 7:20, “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye yet fail to perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?” as a lesson on several things from humility to being nonjudgmental.
- From Luke 5:22, “What are you thinking in your hearts?” to be honest with ourselves and guided in our actions from a soulful or righteous standpoint.

- From Luke 22:27, “For who is greater, the one seated at the table or the one who serves?” which teaches us about *Servitude...being a Servant (Doing All We Can Do)* and the message that the *Last are First*.
- From Luke 24:26, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter his glory?” that teaches that the *Long Game Requires Perseverance*.
- In Matthew 27:42 and Mark 13:54, the well-known phrase of Jesus questioning the Lord God during his crucifixion, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” that shows us that Jesus had weak moments and even doubts about His faith just like us. In the New Testament in particular, these words and messages of Jesus and others are repeated, sometimes verbatim.

While Jesus rarely answered questions, but He did answer important and central questions in this short conversation in Luke 10:25-28. “On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” he asked. “What is written is the Law. How do you read it?” Jesus asked. He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus replied, “You have answered correctly.” Wow, this is a 100% all in commitment as “all” was used four separate times!

Regularly and frequently questioning ourselves and others is a must and always worthy when we do so with His purpose(s). We must stand up for change and justice, and we must question what is *Right and Righteous* and then act on the answers. Doing so will mean times we must be *Uncomfortable to be Comfortable* to lead to a Godlier life.

April 28, 2019, and January 12, 2020

Right and Righteous

I coined the phrase “right and righteous” years back. Surely many others have used the same phrase just as others said, “Just do it” before Phil Knight built a brand on that phrase or “Do the right thing,” a phrase connected to Spike Lee. While it can be used in a variety of contexts, right and righteous has a defined meaning for me. When making a decision that involves us and/or others, we must consider potential positives and negatives for all people involved in that decision and measure them in a biblical sense, i.e., righteousness as viewed through a different lens...His lens.

What is right is all too often measured as what is right for me, a self-centered or self-serving view, instead of being rooted in *Selflessness*. In *Personal and Professional Test*, I write of ongoing choices and decisions despite the sacrifice(s) of my children and myself by standing up for what was right and righteous when the Lord blessed me with the opportunity to serve as concluded in *Test in a New Light*.

It is important to step back and assess a topic/decision of substance and study the word, asking ourselves “*What Would Jesus Do?*”, and How should we act in a way that is both *Right and Righteous* to guide us in making decisions for the sake of others and ourselves?

From James 4:17, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin.” If a decision is measured by integrity and a moral compass rooted in righteousness, we usually make the right decisions. From Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him.” Breaking this down, the verse says, “do everything,” which is all inclusive, and both “in word and deed” or actions, and most importantly “in the name of Jesus.” Therefore, how can we make any decision of relative substance if it is not measured and interchangeable in righteousness?

As a young teen and even preteen, I began reading many books, including college textbooks, on human behavior, particularly abusive and alcoholic behavior as I tried to understand my father’s mostly verbal abuse as well as my mother’s resulting alcoholism as referenced more in *Alcoholism in the Family*. Growing up with two battling alcoholics taught me how to approach interpersonal relationships with those we love or others differently.

Basically, I tried to put myself in the other person’s shoes (logically and emotionally) or from their perspective totally separate of all the logic and emotions I might feel in a situation or interaction between us. I then tried to weigh in on the other person’s understanding and considerations separately from mine and tried to look at things objectively like a third-party psychologist or psychiatrist would do. I then tried to respond, or act based on a) their perspective, b) my perspective and c) what is the right or appropriate common ground.

As I have become *Born Again and Again*, I think the same way except I now have a fourth perspective that has become first - to think and act as the Lord expects, i.e., righteousness measured in selflessness, compassion and understanding. Acting righteously is usually the equivalent of *Acting Godly or asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"* It is even more important to do so with loved ones including family, siblings and a committed partner, yet acting this way must still be part of our everyday interactions.

March to May 2015 and July 17, 2019

Loving in the Name of the Lord

All Christians (and most followers of other religions) know that we have a God of love and that we are expected to act loving. From John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Yes, God is love, and He also expects us to be loving in general and we must love to fully know God.

From John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” In addition, John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It is an extremely well-known verse and the ultimate example of God’s love emanating from Jesus’s sacrifice on our behalf.

Some of the most well-known Biblical passages speak of love in general or toward others including Mark 12:31, “The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no

commandment greater than these,” or Romans 13:10 “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the Law.” Many who are not people of faith still live by this premise, yet many Christians need regular reminders to love in the day to day and moment to moment, let alone to *Love All Brothers and Sisters*.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 speaks of love in all-encompassing ways “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” 1 Corinthians 13:13 continues with “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love.” Yes, the Bible speaks of a loving Christ and encourages us repeatedly to act loving toward others.

The Bible also expects us that we should have a loving, faithful, and committed partner and guides us to what is expected of us in being in love in the name of the Lord. From Matthew 19: 4-6, “He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Ephesians 4:2 states, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” The verse speaks of being “in love.” For many of my past committed and yoked relationships, I was not in love, just loving. The Bible and the Lord does expect us to be fully *in* love with a partner.

1 John 4:18-19 states, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has nothing to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because He first loved us.” Fear is interchangeable with anxieties or concerns. Plus, we fear the things that have the most value. Plus, we fear change and that is interwoven with falling in love and a committed relationship. This can be overcome through communication and love itself. After all, love overcomes all.

We are usually hindered by our past hurts and therefore, we can struggle to love a partner fully even as we are Blessed with God’s love. We are granted free will and choices, including love and how we love. We must be purposeful in all things that are righteous or worthy, and nothing is more worthy than love and loving.

September 2016, December 2017, 2019, and March 21, 2021

A Childlike Approach to Prayer and Loving

In Paul E. Miller’s book, *A Praying Life*, the early chapters are about a childlike approach to prayer. It rightfully states that anything we pray and speak to the Lord as open as a small child with our emotions on our sleeve is a positive. From Luke 18:17 “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

I am more emotional than most men. I still can't talk about many things without getting to the edge of tears or tears, like reading *Children One and All* by Rod McKuen, which I read to my mother as she lay unconscious hours before she passed away or telling the story of thankfulness of a family from Sierra Leone that RCHP resettled after seven years of living in squalor in a refugee resettlement camp.

It's also hard to tell the story of my Uncle Don (included in *Aunts and Uncles*) without tears, who was dying from brain cancer the last time I saw him at age 17 yet he did not let on about his illness. He defined dignity. His overwhelming desire was to pay for my college education, which I turned down due to my mother's pride in not telling Uncle Don how his best friend, my father, had left us poor. I am thankful these memories are part of my life and find no shame in my tears. Like children that can laugh and cry more easily, expressing emotions is a great thing. At least we can or should be more in control of those emotions than children!

As I have written in *For Better or For Worse Approach to Living Life*, God expects us to be totally open with our loved ones and very open with most. Most children, particularly before the Age of Reason at seven to eight years old, are totally open and unfiltered. They are more openly loving, because they innately know Mommy and Daddy love them no matter what they do.

While I was not yet the man of deeper faith when my mom passed in 2003 let alone when my Uncle Don passed when I was just 18, there is a connection. Those we love and maybe more so have lost make us more emotional and rawer in our emotions. Children are raw in their emotions, too. They cry easily; they lash out easily; they love easily. We should love much more easily too.

From Matthew 18:3 "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Clearly praying openly without a filter, just as a child would pray, is important for us to understand and practice as well. May we remember that a childlike approach to prayer and loving should be part of our daily living.

August and November 2016, and March 21, 2021

Absolute Forgiveness

Most Christians know that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and are therefore we are absolutely forgiven. Nonetheless, most would also admit they have issues in forgiving those in our life sufficiently let alone absolutely.

From Mark 11:25 "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." From Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." These passages suggest we must forgive to be forgiven beyond Jesus's sacrifice. That could prompt a debate unto its own, but one thing is not debatable is the awesome power, healing and Blessing in His forgiveness and our forgiveness of others.

The Book of Luke 15:11-32 tells the story of the Prodigal Son. These verses speak about a father of means, one with many servants, who has two sons. One son asks for half of everything his father owns so he might have it before his father dies and his father grants that wish. The son moves away, lives a wayward lifestyle and squanders all the money. He then decides he will return to his father to ask if he can earn his forgiveness and serve as one of his hired workers. The Passages end with 15:31-32 “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

This is a clear example of acting as the Lord would act. He welcomes him back into the family with open arms and celebrates his return as though nothing had ever happened. That is ultimate and absolute forgiveness by the father in the story, just like our Father in heaven.

Colossians 3:13 states “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Note we must “forgive whatever” as an all-inclusive statement. Also note “forgave” is past tense implying we are already forgiven by Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

As humans, we struggle with forgiveness in general but more so absolute forgiveness, which means total or 100% forgiven. That said, forgiving does not mean forgetting. Depending on the extent of an act or sin, we may forgive and love absolutely, but still limit our literal and emotional exposure with that person.

Yes, it is hard to truly forgive when the forgiven don’t seek or acknowledge a need for forgiveness, yet in addition to the Lord’s purpose in us, we must forgive for our own well-being. Common sense says you will be so much happier if you don’t harbor ill will.

Our ability to forgive says a lot about us as human beings. Those that hold grudges often have other qualities that are not so admirable and in fact are the opposite of being both *Right and Righteous*. Those that forgive easily typically usually have godly qualities including kindness, compassion, mercy, grace, and love.

We should never forget to forgive ourselves first as that is paramount for our own well-being, and that also enhances our ability to forgive others. God wants healing for us to lead to a happier existence and spread that joy. Forgiveness is loving and healing at work.

June 2015, May 2019, April 4, 2020, and March 21, 2021

By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith

In Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV), Paul writes “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” There is a lot said in these passages, beginning with the topic of “by grace you have been saved through faith.” Grace leads to faith and then to salvation, three interconnected principles or beliefs for all Christians.

We are justified by both grace and faith. Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” and Romans 3:24, “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.” While Catholics have a slightly different view, Protestants typically see it as God imputed his righteousness and with this view, we have an assurance of salvation. This is what I believe and likely many if not most non-denominational pastors and their followers as well.

In John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth,” we are told of God’s fullness in grace and truth. His grace is everywhere, in the beauty of a flower, in the smile of a child, in the emotional, psychological, or physical healing of anyone. When we ask *What is Truth*, we must remember that Jesus was full of “grace and truth” and that truth has to be measured in asking, “What Would Jesus Do?”

From 2 Corinthians 12:9, “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” When we are humble and selfless, we are not boastful, and can speak of our weaknesses as an example of being humble servants for the Lord.

As Christians who are faithful, we have a God of grace. In life, and by God’s grace (and our repentance), it is who we *are* that matters, not who we *were*. Again, as suggested in Ephesians 2:8-9, faith, grace and salvation are all interconnected, and you cannot have one without the others starting with God’s grace. We are favored by so many of God’s graces. Therefore, despite the brokenness around us, we should be thankful and filled with hope for today and all our tomorrows.

Summer 2015, July 5-13, 2019

The Gift of Mercy

The primary definition for “mercy” in Merriam-Webster is “compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power, as well as lenient or compassionate treatment.” Dictionary.com defines “mercy” as “compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm,” so this is consistent. The definition of “forbearance” is “patient self-control; restraint and tolerance “according to Merriam-Webster.

From Hebrews 4:16 , “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” These terms are used interchangeably at times by many. However, mercy and grace are very different.

To quote www.questions.org that sums up the difference succinctly, “to summarize the difference: mercy is God not punishing us for our deserved sins and grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. Mercy is deliverance from judgement, grace is extending kindness to the unworthy.”

From BibleStudyTools.com “Mercy is an extension of and expression of love, an act of kindness, compassion, or favor.” Mercy is a characteristic of the One True God.” We also clearly have a God of love, who compels us to be loving as mentioned *Loving in the Name of the Lord*. Only a loving God can show so much mercy to us despite our sins and imperfections. From Lamentations 3:22-23, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassion fails not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

We regularly slip in our faith journey and need his mercy and compassion every day. Micah 6:8 states, “He has showed you O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” Here, we are directed to *Act Godly* and to show mercy to others. Luke 6:36, “Be Merciful, just as the Father is Merciful” reaffirms this truth.

We have free will to make good and bad choices, including choosing from a myriad of God-given paths too. What we do will not alter His love and mercy for all of us.

June 2018, December 26, 2019, and March 21, 2021

Selflessness

I recently attended a service at Biltmore Baptist near Asheville. When Pastor Frank spoke of being selfish, he pointed out that whenever we look at a picture that includes us, we comment on ourselves like “my eyes were closed,” or “my clothes were not right” versus comments on others in the picture.

Progress is a Process in so many ways. In this case, that means the process of going from being mostly selfish to mostly selfless often evolves over my lifetime. I’d like to think that has been on an accelerated basis for me over the past 10-15 years in *Studying the Word* from many different perspectives. With that in mind, I created a prayer:

Prayer of Selflessness

Lord, may we always be selfless with our children, our family, our friends, and strangers as we never forget that we must serve You first.

Lord, I pray for continued understanding to then be more selfless from random interactions to family to the pursuit of love.

Lord, please lead me to the right people to have the righteous balance in my life.

Lord, allow all of us to be better people because we pray deeply and share fellowship.

Lord, thank you for all the opportunities and Blessings to give back in Your name through my work and fellowship.

Lord, guide me, show me the paths that are selfless and righteous to guide my mission in You.

August 14, 2016, and July 15, 2017

Servitude...Being a Servant (Doing All We Can Do)

Serving and giving are often intertwined. Giving in a church setting or to the Lord in general has been defined by a couple of pastors I have heard as Time, Talents and Tithing (TTT), which makes both logical and biblical sense. Tithing and to a lesser degree time are clearer than talents that can vary from singing at church or in communication to prompt healing.

Giving of oneself or servitude in all respects must be ongoing. We should never rest on our so-called laurels when we can serve or give more in time, talents, and tithing. We must ask regularly, "Am I doing enough?" From Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." The key components and words in this passage are "always" and "fully," which are absolute or without exception.

From 1 Peter 4:10, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Again, we see absolute without exception biblical guidance in "each" and "whatever" relative to serving others.

From John 12:26, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." We must seek to please and honor God in our servitude, yet we must question if we are truly serving if we are not "all in" as stated in the prior passages. It is His expectation for us to use our time, talents and fully tithing possible to give and serve. Imagine a world where all the billionaires and even tens of millionaires and up gave half their financial worth. That wouldn't change their lifestyle, yet we would eliminate poverty.

As I realized and mentioned in *Test in a New Light*, I was placed on a path and surrounded with many key people by the Lord. If measured in the TTTs, my contribution to the good works in that time was estimated at 5% tithing (of TTT at this time with actual tithing over 10%), 45% time (A year or so off without pay) and 50% talents.

We must be proactive, meaning efforts in varied directions to use all your God given resources for your family and others.

November 16, 2019, January 17, 2020, and March 21, 2021

Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness

Most Christians know that love and loving, including our loving the Lord, family, friends and on acting loving to all, is the Lord's expectation in us. All things worthy emanates from love, as well as *Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness*. Calming is the opposite of holding on to

anxieties. I am reminded of the saying on my friend's coffee cup "My worries are few because my blessings are many!"

Trained psychologists or psychiatrists are schooled to address patient anxieties (ranging from concerns to fears). Others practice yoga, exercise, or meditate for calming and the interconnected inner peace to find happiness. As I have aged or more matured in Him, I am both mostly calm and at peace because the Lord has my back.

I have always been a predominately positive (*Seven Positive Principles*) even as I have had bouts of anxiety(ies). Some of us are just more wired as such, and some of us follow in our parents' footsteps, as I did with my mother in this regard. Positivity eases anxieties and brings us peace.

The Bible includes many passages on these topics that offer direct and unwavering understanding of how we should live our life in Him by being loving, kind, communicative, compassionate, merciful, forgiving, repentant, honest and trustworthy as well as calm, joyful, at peace and live in happiness.

Calming Versus Anxiety

Psalm 94:19 - When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.

Philippians 4:16 - Do not be anxious about anything.

Proverbs 12:25 - Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.

Matthew 11:28-30 - Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

1 Peter 5:7 - Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Peace

Psalm 37:37 - Consider the blameless, observe the upright, a future awaits those who seek peace.

Isaiah 26.3 - You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust you.

Psalm 4:8 - In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Colossians 3:15 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

John 3:18 - Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

John 16:33 - I have told you those things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Joy

Love and Joy - Galatians 5:22 - But the first of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness and faithfulness.

Joy and Gladness - Isaiah 51:11 - And those the Lord rescued will return; they will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Joyful Heart - Proverbs 17:22 - A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Joy in Communication - Proverbs 15:23 - A person finds joy in giving an apt reply - and how good is a timely word!

Joy in Perseverance - James 1:2-3 - Consider in great joy my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith brings perseverance.

Happiness

Proverbs 15:13 - A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.

2 Chronicle 9:7 - How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom.

Jobs 8:21 - He will fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting.

Psalms 37:4 - Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Happiness, joy, calming, and peacefulness are all intertwined with a consistent attitude of thankfulness. This prose was written years before the narrative and verses above.

Rewording

Recognition, Reflections, Rethinking and Reassessments are part of an ongoing praying life to develop our abilities to be compassionate, kind, forgiving and loving with all in our life.

Remembering those we love and loved so we can channel them in finding ways to share the positives in loving in our day to day lives.

Reborn, as a confession of sins in a spiritual awakening but as a series of growth spurts in Him.

Restoration of our faith, trust and beliefs in the Lord should extend to loved ones and His disciples here on earth.

Rebuilding, Reviving and Retooling our relationships with Him is an ongoing process and extends to building up others in stronger foundations.

Reaffirmations, Reiterations and Reminders for ourselves and those around us are worthy when rooted in how the Lord expects us to live our lives.

Rejuvenation, Renew, Re-engage, Repair and/or Reestablish your friendships, fellowship, family relationships and first and foremost, faith in Him through how you live your life.

Responses and Reacting should be thoughtful, measured and weighed as such as to what the Lord would expect for us with others, and Resolution than possible.

Reaching is a must, whether that means the extra effort in righteous change in ourselves and for others, or in reaching one or many.

Realization is key to understanding, resulting in reconciliation, redemption and restoration.

Redemption is always possible; it is never too late to be redeemed, as the Lord is patient, forgiving and merciful.

Reconsideration of things that are no longer right can become righteous in Him.

Reconciliation is always possible when we reach for right and righteous reasons.

Resurrection of Jesus, as He died on the cross for our sins makes all re's possible.

November 12-16, 2017, with few additions April 7, 2019

Success is...

Today, my fortune cookie from a local Chinese restaurant read: "Success is never final and failure never fatal. It's courage that counts." I prefer "Success is never assured, and failure is never final."

Success is never final in business, as health issues or economic recessions are among many things that can derail eventual successes. Thankfully, success measured by our Lord is based on our Godly life, our worthy actions and good works, not by our bank accounts and material possessions.

Personal and Professional Test goes to perseverance and courage for worthy success, my greatest measurable success other than my family. Of course, success is also measured in how you treat people, from kindness to compassion in communication and action.

Yesterday, Audrey at 16 months old wasn't clinging to Mom as much as usual when I visited, and perked up with so many smiles, hugs and kisses for Papa despite being sleepy. Finally, after a couple hours of playing with her and Olivia (and our tallest tower of Lego blocks ever), she came over to me with arms open as I opened mine and she climbed in my lap with her head on my shoulder. She was peacefully sleeping within moments. In this, and so many ways...success in the day to day is measured in family and in loving.

July 17th and July 29, 2018

The Only Answer is His Answer

Left or Right, Wrong or Right, Truth or Lies...be careful what you ask for. When you research, when you Google, when you pick your cable station, when you choose what to read, when you choose who to ask, do not ask for a pre-programmed, predetermined answer that mirrors your question. Be exploratory in questioning from an ethical, moral and Godly perspective. Godly means biblical and that means acting as Jesus would act.

Jesus was much about the poor and disenfranchised needing the basics of health, food, and shelter but also in so many other ways. These principles permeate the bible and should be the basis of our expectations in seeking answers and acting on those answers in a polarized world.

September 29, 2018

Come as You Are

I awoke this AM with "Come as you Are" as the last words from a dream. I do not remember the rest of the dream, but these not original words came to me immediately:

Downtrodden and weary, Come as you are
Damaged and broken, Come as you are.

The biblical stories of Jesus here on earth include His healing and caring mostly for the poor, downtrodden and broken. There is no precise passage from the Bible for "Come as you are", but several are close like John 6:37 and "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" and Romans 10:13 and "for all that call on name of the Lord will be saved." The key in this last passage is "all" meaning there are no boundaries of people that can come to the Lord to be saved to gain His guidance, healing, forgiveness, mercy and love.

Most of us know that at our best or our worst, the Lord is with us. "For better, for worse; for richer or for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish 'til death do us part" is a marriage vow rooted in biblical passages but not a passage itself. A *Better or Worse Approach to Living* goes beyond the commitment to a loving partner, but in family, friends and in how we approach fellowship.

We cannot hide who we are to the Lord, as he sees all we are, and He accepts and forgives. We must *Trust in Transparency*, in the openness of expression, understanding and learning from others around us. We must accept our limitations as well as our differences. Come as you are.

September 2, 2018

Faithful to God's Laws

Laws made by governments rule us in many and too many ways. Some protect our safety while others subrogate our rights for the sake of big business. As measured by their actions and more so inactions, what is done is far short for those most in need. From Galatians 5:14, "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love thy neighbor as yourself." Like so many statements by Paul and other disciples, this is an absolute statement as in the "entire law."

Paul goes further in his teaching to the church with Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Against such things there is no law." Again, the absolute statement "there is no law" because God's laws or rules of conduct for us supersede all human law.

Nonetheless, in seeming biblical conflict, the Bible instructs Christians to obey the laws of the government with Romans 13:1-7 being the most quoted verses by theologians. From Romans 13:1-2, "Let everything be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." These verses tell us that authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement upon themselves.

The Apostle Paul wrote Romans or Letter to the Romans, and he is considered the principal author of the New Testament with 13 Epistles. Many consider Romans to be his most comprehensive and compelling book, an explanation of salvation through Jesus' gospel. I tend to look for absolute statements like "there is no authority except that which God has established."

But wait a minute, isn't everything, good and bad, sent by God? Our God can crush the devil when He desires to do so; therefore, bad people and unjust governments alike only exist at God's will. Nothing can supersede the words and actions of Jesus, the same Jesus that expects us to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). We are taught by Jesus to *Love All Brothers and Sisters* as well as many other important principles. Love means standing up for inequalities and those most in need.

Doesn't He constantly test us in our lives, including temptations where we must use our granted free will and gained wisdom to make both *Right and Righteous* decisions? He does, of course. Doesn't He expect us to stand up for injustices? Of course, he does as Isaiah 1:17 states, "Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." So, if we are supposed to stand up for others in need, doesn't that include the biggest collective source of injustice...our governments? That doesn't mean revolution in the form of a violent uprising, but it does mean an uprising. Uprisings need great leaders that create collective will like *Martin Luther King and His Early Influence* for me and for so many.

From Jesus' words and actions, we must help and serve those most in need, including the basics of food, healthcare and shelter. That means standing up, uprisings, collective voices, and peaceful actions when governmental laws that promote inequality and are in conflict with God's laws. When we do so, we are then truly being faithful Christians to God's laws.

May 2nd, 9th and 16th 2020

We Must Be the Light for Others

I favor openbible.info as a resource because it lists verses in order of the most polled results on the topic. The two verses that were ranked first and second on being the light are as follows:

- John 8:12 ESV, "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world, Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
- John 1:15 ESV, "The light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it." He is both the light (even in darkness) and expects us to be the light. You can walk anywhere, even in the darkest places and know that the Lord is there to protect you."
- Also, from Matthew 5:16 ESV, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven."

Now more than ever we must be the light for others in everything that our Lord expects of us including kindness, compassion, understanding, counseling, discipleship, mercy, grace, and love. For many if not most of us in these times, we have heightened concerns, but we also have increased opportunities to be His light for others.

April 6, 2020

COVID-19: Lamenting Versus an Urge for Christian Rationalism

This morning, Pastor Stephanie's 2020 Palm Sunday sermon was only online due to the pandemic. It was focused on lament, starting with a hopeful verse in Lamentations 3:21-23 (NLT), "Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning." We lament and ask "why" at times without any expectation of answers. She later suggested going to a *Time* magazine story "*Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To.*" (<https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/>) Below is something I found meaningful from that piece:

Rationalists (including Christian Rationalists) want explanations; Romantics (including Christian Romantics) want to be given a sigh of relief. But perhaps what we need more than either is to recover from the biblical tradition of lament. Lament is what happens when people ask, "Why?" and do not get an answer. It's where we get to when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our sins and failings and look more broadly at the sufferers of

the world. It's bad enough to face a pandemic in New York City or London. What about a crowded refugee camp on a Greek Island? What about Gaza? Or South Sudan?

I understand the need for the lamentations of others, even as I stopped my own literal and frequent lament as explained of "Why me Lord" around 2007 as mentioned in *Test in a New Light*, and I have rarely lamented since. Plus, lamentations are not part the Christian Rationalist viewpoint (or Christian Romantic) mentioned in the Time article that defines me now. While I understand that there are not always answers, the Christian Rationalist in me cannot help wondering if COVID-19 is a God given message for us.

In a discussion of these times with my dear friend Paula about two weeks ago, she reminded me that all things are God given, even plagues and viruses. Last night as I was writing I listened to several sermons, including one by Dr. Michael Youssef of Leading the Way Ministries. The sermon was centered on the book of the prophet Joel entitled "an Army of Locusts" that begins with 2:1, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand."

The Book of Joel continues with the wrath of God in the form of a plague of locusts to in effect set straight nations that had gone astray. In Joel 3:1, "...when I will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem." Dr. Youssef saw two lessons from Joel 2, comparing an army of locusts to this virus. First, the economy was terrible in Jerusalem before the locusts and too many turned away from God to false idols (as so many have done today) instead of becoming closer and more centered in Him. Repentance was needed for this. Second, both then and now are times when we must demonstrate and speak our faith to bring others closer to God. Now is the time when we need many more disciples. "Sound the alarm," he advised with other similar exclamations to be prepared for the Day of Judgement in the future he concluded in a hopeful way.

There have been plagues and viruses many times before in human history. My mother was born in 1913 and gave birth to me in her 40's. As a 5-year-old, one of her earliest ingrained memories (during the 1918 Spanish Flu) was walking with Uncle George on her way to school or stores when they passed many caskets in the street because the funeral homes were unable to pick up the dead fast enough. We had an extended conversation about this a couple times that included how living in close quarters in row houses in an industrial area with tenements nearby in Stamford at the time made the virus spread more.

In my research on the 1918 pandemic, cities like Philadelphia were hit hard. Several sources stated that 675M Americans had died, although that was just reported cases and that number could have been double or more. The population was much less then and as bad as COVID-19 is, it will not be nearly as bad as 1918 because eventually we will have treatments and a vaccination. 1918 was a more horrific time so close on the heels of WWI, but the boom of the roaring 20's followed. We recovered and, in some ways, thrived even if not thriving in our Lord more as a society that was more about play time than thankfulness or works.

Sometimes we are tested by the Lord; we are meant to feel His wrath. The Bible is full of examples. For me, I can see the biblical validity in Dr. Youssef's sermon and conclusion that this time may be like the story in Joel or in Ezekiel 7:8-9, "I am about to pour out my wrath on you

and spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look at you with pity; I will not spare you. I will repay you for your contact and for the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the Lord that strikes you.” The prophet Ezekiel spoke of the destruction and resurrection of Jerusalem not as end of days but more as a period in history. We should not assume that plagues or viruses like COVID-19 are part of the end of days or *End of Centuries* as I call it, but rather very likely a time the Lord is giving us a societal wake up call.

The next months and likely longer after I write this will be difficult and more challenging for so many people on so many levels. Yet, will it be as terrible as World War II, the most recent horrific time worldwide? Almost assuredly not, and we collectively recovered from that period into the boom of the 50’s and 60’s, During the 60’s, more good things were done for those that were disenfranchised than ever before in U.S. history, except for the end of slavery that didn’t end regular persecution of African Americans thereafter. Unfortunately, that momentum slowed after the losses of Bobby Kennedy and MLK as referenced in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Early Influence*.

This difficult time is just beginning (April 2020), but the loss of lives and the ripple effects on economies will pass as other difficult times have passed, even as more of the poor to the working poor that make up so much of the so-called middle class are further disadvantaged. As we live during this time, we must remember the Lord’s purpose(s) and look hard at what His purpose may be now.

Now is the time for all of us to stand up and remember that *Compassion and Kindness are Common Threads for Humanity*. Your neighbor(s) everywhere need you. Time to step up to His plate.

April 5, 2020

Humble Yet Confident

I try to express myself humbly, yet with confidence. “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less,” is one of the most well know quotes from C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*.

In sharing my understanding of the word, some have asked “And who are you?” And who *am* I? Everyone has free will and the right to speak. We are in a relative free country, at least freer if you are a white male, yet we also have an obligation to speak, even more if we read and hopefully comprehend the Bible. We need to stand up for justice, i.e., what is *Right and Righteous* as measured in the Bible and ask, “*What Would Jesus Do?*”

No matter the author, all of us have a responsibility when we choose to be a messenger. I believe, hope and pray that I can reach many through my written word and in a variety of other effects, and know I am *Accountable for My Actions and Words*. As I wrote not long ago, “May my words be His words. May I be true to the principles of what the Bible intends.”

When attending Christ Church in the spring of 2016, Pastor Ireland's sermon centered on a single passage from 2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." There are three things in this passage we are asked to do, first humble yourself, secondly seek the Lord and third, turn from wicked ways.

The sermon continued with healing examples and pictures on screens of two opposed groups of protesters being peaceful and another with protesters embracing a policeman. He went on, "The proud want to be right; the humble want to be reconciled" and "The proud are centered on how much they know; the humble are aware of how little they know" and lastly "The proud are conscious of appearances, the humble are conscious of what is right." I know I am better and better at these humble examples yet have much room for improvement as well.

There is a strong connection made for me between humbleness and forgiveness, including *Being Contrite is a Blessing*. Being contrite and humbleness are regularly interchangeable. We must be cautious in assuming someone is being egotistical (the opposite of humble) instead of confident in general, or maybe just confident in Him. Confidence and being expectant of God's potential purpose in us can sometimes appear to be prideful or boastful, again the opposite of being humble.

As support for the who am I question, I included *Studying the Word* and included the longer version of *Personal and Professional Test* that many said was too complicated for most readers. I did so because that provides context of why I have confidence in my expression hopefully centered in the Lord. Plus, just maybe he'll use me and others around me to reach many like he did in that time.

While we are not supposed to be prideful, you can be proud of your children when they are kind, giving, loving or other components of *Acting Godly* and humble. Being proud does have to mean being boastful. It is such a delicate balance to not be overconfident even when acting for *Right and Righteous* reasons like walking the walk of fellowship and giving back.

The statement of the Pastor Ireland from 2016 of "The proud want to be right; the humble want to be reconciled" is worth repeating. The answer to that would take volumes, but simply put, we must stand up for those that are most in need and those where inequity is a way of life. We must reconcile as many wrongs done for as many as best as possible. That includes one on one and being part of the big picture. We must shed the influence of ego and focus on Jesus's selfless expectations in our doing for others. Can we humbly put ourselves in the other person's shoes? In the collective shoes of one group, small or larger, and push through no matter the odds? When we act in humbleness, we can accomplish good works and be the light for others.

July 17 and August 14, 2016, July 20, 2019, and April 2, 2020

From Effort to His Love (2 Peter 1:5-7)

From 2 Peter 1:5-7 “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, love.” There is so much in these passages!

First, we must make every effort. E is for effort in the acronym *COPAETAF* that I wrote in 2004, yet a worthy reminder. I researched the Bible with various sources but cannot find another time “effort” is directly stated let alone the all-encompassing phrase “every effort.” However, in some translations, “every effort” is replaced with “full due diligence,” the same meaning.

That said, there are plenty of scriptures telling us to do our best, and therefore make a full effort. Colossians 3:23 states, “Whatever you do, work heartedly, as for the Lord and not for men,” and heartedly means with soulful effort. There are many passages that indirectly speak of effort like “toil and strive” as in make the effort to work hard stated in 1 Timothy 4:10 or “Whatever the activity in which you engage, do it with all your ability.” We must never underestimate the need and value for effort in all worthy pursuits including giving back.

Faith and goodness are intertwined, yet what is good for one person may not be good for the other person...even when faith centered. Understanding what is good for both requires effort, and that happens through open “no harm, no foul communication.” That builds worthy relationships and unions.

Nothing worthy is easy but it can be earned...with perseverance. From Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Indeed, *The Long Game Requires Perseverance*.

February 12 and 24, 2019, February 16, 2020

The Power of the Holy Spirit Within

As the overwhelming majority of Christians know, the Holy Trinity includes the Father (God), the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is defined by Dictionary.com as “the spirit of God” and “the presence of God as part of a person’s religious experience.” From John 14:26 NIV, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” I hopefully regularly channel the Holy Spirit as the power within me in my writings and in my day to day.

His Spirit is everywhere. We can see it in the smiles of children, the glorious sunset or in giving and doing despite the challenges. So many things that now may seem inconsequential can become beautiful when we recognize and channel the Holy Spirit within us. Believe in God, the father, and Jesus Christ, the son, but also believe and live every moment possible with the power of the Holy Spirit within.

February 15, March 7th, 8th and 15th, 2020

Salvation (Being Saved)

Dictionary.com's definition of salvation tied to theology is "Deliverance from sin and its consequences, believed by Christians to be brought about by faith in Christ" falls somewhat short. From Romans 10:9-10 (NIV), "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

This verse resonates for me, yet we must also repent and confess our sins. From 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." From Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The opposite of salvation is condemnation. From Mark 16:16 (NIV), "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Salvation means eternal life as further mentioned in John 3:16 (NIV), "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

From 1 John 3:6, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." Clearly, we are all sinners, and while we may sin less and less, and those sins may be of lesser consequence, this verse and many others set a very high bar. As such, while we are saved by our savior, we must always strive to be better and better in Him and offer repentance on an ongoing basis.

December 2019, March 7th through 15th, 2020

Biblical Interpretations

My oral and written expressions are hopefully rooted in biblical understanding and blessed interpretations. I have done my best in *Studying the Word*, an utmost responsibility in *Reaching to Reach Others*. From 2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

In addition to bible study, part of the process of my continued growth as a Christian and a man of faith who is yearning to learn and reach includes listening to many different biblical interpretations from many different pastors, churches, and faiths (live, radio and online) about the same topics to guide my interpretations.

From Dictionary.com, hermeneutics is the "the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts." From a 2013 sermon by Pastor John F. MacArthur, "We need to reconstruct the setting to understand the context of the time it was

written.” That is true for so many biblical topics, even more for passages and books in the Old Testament were even with context, connecting the dots can be a very subjective reach.

When it comes to interpretations of the Bible, there are many different schools of thought from Pentecostal to Calvinists to Catholics to Jehovah Witness’s to Mormons to individuals. All Christians have far more in common than differences even though interpretations vary and, therefore, so do our beliefs. We do have a God that grants us free will.

In our broken world most people, including politicians or newscasters, often use out of context opinions with occasional facts or truths. While Pastor MacArthur stated, “Every biblical text has one true interpretation,” yet in some cases, *Truth Requires Context*.

Pastor MacArthur continued, “When looking at God and the writer in the Bible, what is the intent of the author?” I have directly and indirectly posed that question many times in my thoughts and prayers. Again, from Pastor MacArthur’s sermon, the five principles of biblical interpretations are summed up as follows:

- Literal principle as in matter-of-fact statements in the Bible and in our lives often have no hidden meaning.
- The historical context of text is key like the politics, customs of the people and characteristics of a city and more for the date the text was written.
- Grammatical study and syntax (how words connected to each other) provide context when we look at the language of the original text.
- The synthesis principle, namely scripture interpreting scripture on either the same or a related topic, is a key principle for me when I typically attempt to make a biblical case for a topic.
- The practical principle summed up as the implication of a teaching over the application (do this) if it is more for the readers to understand and then do for themselves.

Like most of us, I have heard a variety of different takes on the same biblical topic, even the interpretation of Jesus’ sacrifice and death on the cross for our salvation. I have heard most pastors make Biblical arguments that because of Jesus’ sacrifice alone, we are completely forgiven for our sins. I have heard other interpretations that have limits on that forgiveness, which is the more acceptable interpretation for me as I believe we must seek the Lord’s forgiveness on an ongoing basis and serve penance.

We have heard in sermons from the Bible that “God loves all his children.” “All” is all-inclusive. It means all Christians and all members of all faiths. It means those that have gone astray. It is all, no matter their sexual orientation. It is friends and enemies alike. It is all that are like us and all different from us in any and every way.

There are so many absolute commands of the Lord that are all inclusive, where context is without relevance. In fact, for most important principles of living as the Lord’s expects, there is no interpretation required.

August 27, 2015, and May 17, 2020

Ask to Receive

“Ask and you shall receive” paraphrases Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it shall be given to you; and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” The word “ask” means prayer to the Lord, and we must pray. We must understand that we are on God’s time and must be patient on our expectations of receiving. We must be purposeful and to some degree of practical in our asks of the Lord, including limiting material requests.

In our day-to-day lives, we must “Ask to Receive” from others as well as the Lord. This includes asking for help from individuals or a family or a group. It also can include asking to connect two or even more groups to help a third party (individual, family or group). For example, one way I have been blessed to serve is finding nonprofits and churches that have donations, volunteers and vans for other churches/nonprofits to use as needs for those they serve arose.

Our God expects us to be purposeful. In *Four Actions to Spread our Faith*, David Ireland of Christ Church spoke of these four things that people should do to spread their faith: (1) Be Intentional (Purposeful), (2) Be Expectant (expecting results), (3) Be Prepared, and (4) Be Authentic: These are important in asks of the Lord and asks of others. It is also important to be open and transparent. That builds trust in a world when trusting others has diminished overall.

The worst case in asking for help from others is a no. However, keep asking until you get a yes, and assess modifying the ask along the way.

June 5 and 8th, 2023

Entitlement

As Christians, we are entitled to *Salvation (Being Saved)* based on the sacrifice of the Lord on the cross, and our fully embracing the Lord as our savior. It is there that entitlements, i.e., givens or realities in our life from happiness to health to our daily and future needs, begin and for many ends.

Our ability to plan is limited at times and for many is out of our control, or at least could become so. However, happiness and much more is within our control. From Pastor Charles Swindoll:

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

We are granted free will, a form of entitlement. We can choose to be fulfilled or not. We can praise and serve Him faithfully and regularly or not as well. We can see the joy and peace in that or not.

Health, whether it be physical, mental, or emotional, isn't a "given" or something to which we are entitled and is also too often taken for granted. Hence, my most common prayer is "Lord, thank you for the health and happiness of my children," adding my grandchildren in time.

As we get older, the time remaining lessens. After all, as David Bowie said in the song *Changes*, "Time may change me, but I can't change time." *We are Racing Against an Unknown Clock*, with only the Lord knowing the remaining entitled and granted time.

We must assess what we really need in our life and use our time for everything that is truly important in our life. It takes effort, as important entitlements (health and happiness let alone time) are unknown and perhaps limited. Contentment and happiness are our choice, and His gifts are for our taking.

April 7, 2019, January 17, 2020, and June 25, 2023

Judgement

I never intend to pass judgement in any way, just use good judgement when I offer my humble opinions when I interact with others or in my writings.

Our abilities to understand what is *Right and Righteous* pale in comparison to the only one capable of Judgement. As mere humans, we have no standing to be judgmental and should not show an iota of judgment or condemnation towards anyone. Only the Lord can judge us.

January 27, 2016, April 18, 2020, and February 27, 2023

Better or Worse Approaches to Living Life

For better or worse is a common marriage vow, but it should also be a commitment to family, friends, fellowship and so much more. Whether with a spouse or significant other, our children or others close to us, we have an obligation under the Lord to be open and communicative with compassion and resolution in mind. That includes everything that is positive as well as constructively critical to build each other up on things that are much the opposite. Of course, many are sensitive to what could be called constructive criticism, but when our motive is loving and with healing goals that are aimed to improve a situation or person, we must be open and forthright as a better or worse approach.

In a broader sense, we should take a better or worse approach in business relationships too, building *Trust in Transparency* with forthright communication. I studied The Peter Principle by Laurence J. Peter in college and have applied some of those principles over the years. If employees were not doing a good job in a position, then they should not be stuck in a position or

fired for “reaching their level of incompetence” as Mr. Peter called it. Instead, they should return to their prior position or maybe even move laterally within the organization. I gave the book to many managers when I was in the nursing home and other businesses years back. Being forthright and honest with an employee leads to beneficial solutions for all.

Using the principle of for better or for worse communication with transparency in business and personal interactions leads to resolution. Open and honest communication should be the cornerstone of all interactions. Many in business would suggest that would not be part of “the art of the deal” in business but my responsibilities are to the Almighty, not to the so-called almighty dollar. Humans are resilient; and we can accept honest and forthright communication.

For better or for worse, we must work together and try to reconcile our differences from one on one to groups. For the sake of resolution in the name of the Lord, and for our children and grandchildren, we must stand up and become *Comfortable Being Uncomfortable* in open communication as part of the Lord’s expectations in us.

June 25, 2017, June 23, 2019, and March 22, 2021

What is Truth?

If related to work, truth should be measured through a factual investigation on a project/task, i.e., detailed due diligence. From all standpoints, truth should be measured by an unbiased and informed assessment of the facts. Truth must then be measured based on expectations of the Lord to understand and seek a higher truth.

In business or politics, let alone much more often personally, we should act like Joe Friday (Dragnet) and stick to the facts with references as needed to determine how a fact counters a false, out of context, exaggerated or opposite opinion. In addition, when truthfully communicating on a topic, avoid *Deflection*, i.e., do not “deflect” by mixing or changing topics to avoid a topic (or portion thereof) on an open, on point and truthful basis.

Truth should not be measured by falsely building oneself up through excess ego or even excess confidence. Truth should not be measured by demeaning or derogatory positions against a group or an individual that presents a different opinion.

From John 4:24, “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” Another well-known verse is John 8:32, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” In John 14:6, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” God is the ultimate and pure truth, and we must seek truth to worship Him as well.

Truth should be measured in *Acting Godly* and asking, “*What Would Jesus Do?*” 2 Timothy 2:15 states, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” By using this standard established throughout the Bible, it is very hard to find any politician that would be favorably received by our Lord God.

The opposite of truth is a lie, and the opposite of being truthful is lying. Today's world is seemingly heading into or in the *End of Centuries* fueled by an erosion of truth.

The overwhelming majority of truths should be clear when you ask, "*What Would Jesus Do?*" We cannot let the pursuit of His truth wane. We must be centered in our love for all, and we must believe in truths that are centered in facts through due diligence, not by the collective talking heads from whatever media source(s) we choose. The Lord granted us free will and abilities to reason. Let's be reasonable and loving in the pursuit of truth.

May/June 2019, April 4, 2020, and March 1, 2023

Truth Requires Context

The dictionary defines context as "The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed." This applies in all aspects of our lives, from one-to-one relationships to the Bible and to the lack of context in our politics.

So many well-meaning Christians inadvertently and/or willfully quote the Bible out of biblical context in the pursuit of self-interests, or in justifying one cause or principle for the sake of another. Statements from the Old Testament more than the New Testament are taken out of context to promote and enact racist, misogynist behaviors or actions, or discrimination based on sexual orientation. So many promote so called truths that are closer to falsehoods without the scriptural or topical context of Jesus who loved and forgave those that repented without exception. Leave judgement to God. Many more commingle what should be expected of us from the Lord and their own selfish expectations so communicate out of context, avoid facts, or change topics when presented with truths.

From the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." While on the surface those appear to be "wow" messages interwoven throughout the Bible, they lack in context in His truth. There is hypocrisy that "all men" did not include all men and women regardless of race, creed, or religion. While at times the United States is a great country like how we came together during WWII and the "Greatest Generation," we lacked moral context from our founding. During our 200+ year history, our collective morality has ebbed and flowed with two major self-inflicted downtimes: the Civil War and the last 5-10 years that I hoped had peaked when our last President incited an insurrection.

Lies are reinforced and strengthened in ungodly ways when statements are taken out of context. During interviews on selected television networks, Trump and others implied that extra votes had been cast for Joe Biden using the identities of deceased people in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Georgia. That was so grossly out of context it must be classified as an outright lie. A Georgia election official (a Republican serving under a Republican governor) certified and re-certified that only two dead people voted – not the "I need 11,000 votes" Trump asked for that were needed to change election results. Wouldn't we all be a fool to think that people posing as dead

people haven't voted for hundreds of years? Isn't about the real numbers of so-called dead people? Do you think 2 and 11,000 are comparable or beyond out of context?

Of course, the consistent and persuasive lack of context is not reserved for one party, like the seriousness of Hunter Biden's charges. Both sides forget one wrong does not justify another. When combined with the acrimony from both so called sides in US politics, we can see the connection to what I call *End of Centuries*. Like many of said, it's like small kids fighting in a school yard taking turns being the bully.

Then there is the increasing out of context marketing and pitching us from almost all companies. Ignoring facts and therefore commonplace everywhere and has also become acceptable to a large portion of our population. Getting business done honestly and ethically has become more challenging based on the barrage of public examples. Communication is harder as people can't or won't communicate openly or honestly so much more often. It is no wonder we are losing trust.

According to the *Princeton Press* article, "Trust in a Distrustful World," by Bruce G. Carruthers on October 18, 2022, "And this skepticism has spread outside of partisan politics: according NORC's General Social Survey, the proportion of respondents who said 'You can't be too careful in dealing with people' rose from 50.3% in 1972 to 63.9% in 2018. How can society function with growing distrust?"

Truth is rooted in knowledge. Knowledge is truly applied when fully informed on the facts, all the facts not just those that suit you or your so-called argument. That requires context from politicians to pastors to our one-on-one conversations.

February 2021 and June 6-9th, 2023

Reaching to Reach Others

Reaching to reach others means making an extended effort to be there for other(s) for God's purposes, including those we know and those we don't. Typically, those that need the most help or healing require the most effort. Hence, we must be steadfast to persevere to reach one or many.

Tom Junod's article "Can You Say...Hero?" was inspired by the movie *It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. Mister Rogers was a healer for the author of this article, as he learned to be much more at peace after finding forgiveness from way back in his childhood, and then discovered the true understanding of God's grace. I saw the meaningful movie first, but those points (and God's grace) were much more driven home in that 1998 article.

From the article on Mister Rogers "...yet when he speaks, it is that voice, his voice, the famous one, the unmistakable one, the televised one, the sly voice dressed in sweater and sneakers, the soft one, the reassuring one, the curious and expository (intended to explain or describe) one, the sly voice that sounds adult to the ears of children and childish to the ears of adults..." This speaks

to me in several ways. First, part of me is surprised by how emotional I was today in watching the movie, which became more understandable after reading the long article.

I never really watched or appreciated Mister Rogers when I was younger, and my kids didn't watch him much versus Sesame Street. I think part of that was his sounding childish to adults as the author said as well, but it is much more than that. He was clearly a Godly man, truly Blessed by God on a Godly mission to teach and reach. I just wasn't at a place to embrace such raw love and grace in Him and therefore his show those years back.

I am renewed in reaching today. As stated in *Rewording*, "Reaffirmations, Reiterations and Reminders for ourselves and those around us are worthy when rooted in how the Lord expects us to live our lives." On reaching (A Re Word!), I was reminded of a 2012 sermon from Pastor David Ireland of Christ Church called *Four Actions to Spread Your Faith*, with the first action to "Be Intentional (or purposeful)." The other actions were to expect results/expectant, be prepared and be authentic.

We must reach whether it be speaking up and acting up on injustices against all odds or in one-on-one fellowship. All things worthy require extra effort, i.e., reaching. Giving back and reaching in doing so is the primary reason I call RCHP my home church.

Reaching includes taking chances and believing in the Lord and yourself. I recall a sermon of February 2019 when the Pastor referenced an article where centurions were asked what they would do differently in their lives if they had a chance to do it over. They responded they would love more, risk more and give of themselves more. If I were not a risk taker, I would not have been in the position to persevere in various times leading up and during times like the *Personal and Professional Test* and the good works as a result. I pray for fortitude and the will to keep reaching.

June 17 and November 30, 2019

The Pursuit of Wisdom

I have always tried to learn, yet learning does not necessarily translate to wisdom. In my increasing faith and my increased efforts in *Studying the Word*, I expectedly and hopefully have gained much needed wisdom.

Understanding and wisdom are often interconnected. Synonyms for "understanding" include comprehension, grasp, mastery, perception, discernment, appreciation, interpretation, assimilation and absorption and others. If I could strive to achieve all of those on a consistent basis, I know I would be a wise man!

I grew up with the expectation to respect my elders and am an elder. My mom would have related to Job 12:12, "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long-life bring understanding?" While the odds may be better that we gain wisdom with age, if we do not become more compassionate, loving and understanding in Him, we cannot be a wise often in life.

Right and Righteous is based on acting on the principles of "*What Would Jesus Do?*" Yes, we must strive to measure our interactions with others and throughout life in righteousness. It is the righteous, no matter their age, who profess wisdom more consistently. Psalm 37:30 reads, "The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just."

Proverbs 4:6-7 states: "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." God wants us to gain wisdom as He measures it, and by extension wisdom is our protector.

I like to think that I have doubled or tripled my wisdom over the last handful of years in my yearning for learning in my faith journey, yet I know I have still just scratched the surface. I don't expect I will ever be truly wise; I just pray for occasional bouts of regular wisdom.

May 5, 2019, and January 17, 2020

A Prayer for Time

During an RHCP service, the congregation was asked for prayers. Jean Stockdale, a hands-on advocate within the church, was behind me and prayed softly and passionately for the Lord to grant her the time to accomplish all that was before her in her work. That may not have been exactly what she said, but it certainly summed it up for her...and for me. That inspired me to write this prayer:

A Prayer for Time that Resonates

Lord, I have too much to do,
so much feels important.

Help me to set priorities,
so that I don't feel lost in your opportunities.

Give me the wisdom and the energy that's
necessary to accomplish what is needed,
without wasting time or effort.

And help me make the best use of my day,
remembering that time is a precious gift from You.

As literal elders, Jean and I share that race against time as we focus on our respective missions. During announcements at a service a few years later, Pastor Seth announced that Jean would be moving to Houston to work against labor trafficking and refugee resettlement, primarily with Christian Indonesians that face great peril if returned to Indonesia by bad government policies. At first, I felt a bit sad and melancholy, but then I quickly realized Jean would only go to Houston if she could help more people than she was helping now. With the help of grants and sponsors, she has dedicated to helping victims of human trafficking and imprisoned refugees.

I found out later that before Jean moved from Houston back to NJ, 185 people and families were shown firsthand the love and mercy that God intends through her efforts together with the team around her. We all have time, but it is both unknown and God given so we must be *Racing Against the Unknown Clock*. With His expectations in us, like Jean, we must use our time wisely to be there for family, loved ones and those in need.

September 24, 2016, and April 18, 2020

A Do-Over God

We have a “do-over” God! Our Lord grants second chances, third chances and more. These include the chance to set things straight; to get straight; to heal and to heal a bit more; to grow; to mature. All these things are just a do over better and better Ground Hog Day in the Lord.

Of course, the *Long Game Requires Perseverance* which can be defined is a series of second chances in all aspects of our lives, like a relationship with a family member that has gone astray or our goals of worthy work. One of the most important things in relationships is being there for loved ones, friends and prayerfully even strangers - just being there or having the chance for a do over when you weren’t there before. We have so many God given new opportunities.

We can look at the past in a woe is me way, and once and awhile I do but quickly see His silver linings. Everything, and I mean everything good and bad in the past brings us to where we are now. Plus, whether that is a not so good, OK, good or great place, we always can be in a better place, as we have a do over God.

As stated in Romans 5:3-5 “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” I am at my happiest place because I am centered on thankfulness, part and parcel of the do over process that brought me to a so much better place.

In November 2011, inspired by a sermon in an historical church in New Haven, CT, I wrote *The Message of Hope is Why I am a Christian*. Hope is the twin sister of perseverance that results in magnified do overs opportunities. Yes, we have a God of do overs and second chances that grow into hundreds, thousands and more in chances or do overs...if we see them, have hope and act on them.

Today, I write this on my late Mother’s birthday for Mom, Nana, Nana Lee or Lee to so many. I am reminded and thankful for Mom, as she instilled so many principles that were and are hopefully often Godly in me, including holding myself and others accountable for right and often righteous reasons. Mom instilled loving and positivity as a constant in me that has grown in different ways as I became born again. Being purposeful, I have been blessed and never let grass grow under my feet for the opportunities that a do over God sends my way.

December 17, 2019

Not God Fearing

The bible is filled with passages on the fear of God. We know that sinners that do not repent will incur God's wrath. From Romans 1:18 "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

While I do not relate, it is common for Christians to state they are "God Fearing." If we live and act in a *Right and Righteous* manner, we should not expect God's wrath and therefore have no fear. I am in a place of *Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness* because I know God's mercy, grace and forgiveness is there for me as I repent to then be absolved of sin and wrath.

From John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Therefore, those that haven't truly embraced the Lord, walked the walk by good deeds measured by what is *Right and Righteous* are not subject to wrath, and should not have a fear of God.

From Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV), "Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God, I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

We cannot allow ourselves to be "closet Christians." We need to be expressing and acting upon our faith whenever possible. When we do all we can do and make the ongoing effort to help others, we can be further assured of receiving God's grace and love.

When you see yourself in *Blessed Mirror(s)*, you will lose the overwhelming majority or all of your doubts and fears. You may then be not God fearing as a result.

August 8, 2015, November 1, 2015, July 19, 2019, and March 25, 2021

There Is No Testimony Without Tests

Many have an evolution or changes in life and in Him, and like me, have challenges and tests that result in testimony. Tests can be in health, family, loved ones, fellowship, work and otherwise. We share certain tendencies and behaviors regardless of race, creed, or faith yet we are all different and unique. God makes us that way.

The Lord provides so many choices, opportunities, and paths. Those paths have different forks in the road, let alone twists and turns and dead ends. We are granted free will to choose from among the many paths provided. These paths include people, places, interests, social and faith choices, many or most that become intertwined. Sometimes those paths are tests – tests of our faith. Sometimes they're roads to bad choices and those bad choices need the Lord's forgiveness and teach us to find the right paths. Sometimes those paths are amazingly Blessed. Sometimes they result in our growth over time, in new understandings and lead to testimony. That testimony does not occur without tests.

Potentially so far, the most important thing test that the Lord provided in my life is the *Personal and Professional Test* and *Test in a New Light*. The tests or events that occurred in 2002-2003 had financial ripple effects including bankruptcy and five years of asking “Lord, why me” for the sacrifice to do the right or more righteous thing. By 2007, I realized I was Blessed and chosen (as were many others around me) as we were able to give back in a very significant way. My prayers changed in 2007 as I became centered in thankfulness, later praying daily for years, “Lord, thank you for that opportunity to give back in your name in magnificent ways. Please grant me the opportunity to do so again, Lord.”

There are many types of tests that we all go through in our lives. We must learn and sometimes become battle tested for when the real battles and challenges come our way. We can and must heal, we have to persevere, and we have to grow in those tests too.

We have a *Do Over God*, a Lord of many second chances but we must be proactive. We must look at ourselves honestly and humbly and take a close look at what we did right and wrong measured in kindness, selflessness, and the Lord’s expectations. We must ask hard questions of ourselves and pray thoughtfully and purposely for those answers.

The paths of my life have been long, winding, and complex but the sun is high in the early to mid-afternoon. The sun is bright with purpose and promise. With efforts, steadfastness and mostly His guidance, there will be new tests and new testimonies in the coming years.

October 27, 2017, edited/revised December 25, 2018

Avoid Justification Even if We Are Justified

We must be responsible for our actions...to ourselves, our friends, family and of course, most of all God. Hence, we must be careful of falling into the trap of justifying something we may have done that is not measured by what is *Right and Righteous*. While vindication and justification are synonyms according to many sources, we must be humble; hence, we shouldn’t require vindication. Another definition of justification is “an acceptable reason for doing something” but unless you measure being acceptable according to Him, we must again limit justifying.

Wikipedia’s page on Justification (Theology) defines it as “In Christian theology, justification is God’s righteous act of removing penalty of sin while, at the same time, declaring the ungodly to be righteous, through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.” Amen, by Jesus’ blood and sacrifice on the cross, we are saved and justified despite our sins. According to that same Wikipedia page, “the key difference between the beliefs of different denominations, including most non-denominational churches I have attended, as well as Lutherans and Calvinism (also called the Reformed tradition, Reformed Christianity, Reformed Protestantism, or the Reformed faith), is that in Jesus’ sacrifice, we are saved based on faith alone without works.”

While being saved on faith alone is confirmation that His mercy and grace are endless, He also expects us to do good works as referenced in many verses, including a few below:

- Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
- Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
- James 2:14-17 “What good is it brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So, if faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

This last verse in James totally interconnects faith and works, and therefore if we have faith without works, can we be saved solely by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross? While many or most believe we are saved in embracing the Lord as our Savior and by His sacrifice for us, we must not make excuses (justify) for not doing good works of substance by justifying that we are already saved. Justification is for the Lord.

January 12, 2020, and March 25, 2021

The Long Game Requires Perseverance

Perseverance has been a way of life for me long before I was born again or *Born Again and Again*. On www.openbible.info, which ranks verses from those polled, by far the most quoted verse on perseverance is James 1:12, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” The phrase “stood the test” reminds and warms me with great thankfulness for my tests detailed in *Personal and Professional Test* and *Test in a New Light*.

From Romans 5:3-5, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Sacrifice or suffering requires hope and indeed builds character. Both often go hand in hand with long periods of trials and tribulations such as the endurance (and therefore perseverance) referenced in this verse.

According to various sources, the definitions or synonyms for “perseverance” and “steadfastness” are one and the same. Merriam-Webster defines “the action or condition or an instance or persevering” as steadfastness. Steadfastness is also defined as “firm in belief, determination or adherence.” When we are rooted in faith and firm in belief, we become more steadfast and determined...despite the costs and sacrifices.

From 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” From this verse and so many others, we clearly must be steadfast to persevere in all worthy pursuits and in doing the Lord’s work.

We never know how much time we are granted by the Lord to do good works here on earth. Notwithstanding, while time is surely finite, we are typically granted long and long enough lives with many opportunities to serve and must seek those opportunities as well. We will be tested over and over in little ways and sometimes in very substantive ways. Will must push through challenges as the Lord expects.

We can become consumed by the hardships and challenges to hinder our inherent ability to have hope and persevere. My ever-growing faith in the Lord, positions me not just to persevere but also to grow and evolve in Him. *Progress is a Process*, including that the long game means surviving to get to thriving over time.

Endurance, steadfastness, determination and even sacrifices are required to persevere in a life in the Lord. When we emerge from the other side of times of personal challenges and darkness, we often find ourselves changed for the better and be positioned to help others and to do many good works.

July 2019, March 7, 2020, and March 25, 2021

We Reap What We Sow

“We reap what we sow” is a well-known phrase from the Bible including these verses:

- Galatians 6:7-9 “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”
- 2 Corinthians 9:6 - “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”

What is sowing? It is planting seeds in all important aspects of our life comparable to planting all types of seeds in the field. We must sow and plant seeds in giving back, and sow how we live our lives in every way including how we pray.

We indeed reap what we sow, so plant and cultivate in giving and relationships from strangers to friends to family to loved ones. That means treating others with kindness, mercy, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and love. When we do so, we are also sowing seeds in souls, and we’re reaping the benefits in atonement, healing and giving.

December 9, 2017, November 3, 2018, and March 23, 2021

The Right Direction is His Direction

Today, I headed from Asheville down to Rock Hill south of Charlotte. I am old fashioned and usually good with directions, plus I only like actual people talking to me (so no GPS or related tech even though Alexa does have a nice soothing voice) and yet rarely take wrong turns. I figure

the rare times I do make a wrong turn might be the Lord sending me there for a reason. That was the case today.

While my own personal auto pilot, I was using my Digital Voice Recorder (DVR) as was inspired from a morning sermon and was speaking to then write something later. Distracted, I headed in the wrong direction on Rt. 26 going toward Greenville rather than the other direction towards Charlotte. My stomach influenced my stop at the first Welcome Center. To my pleasant surprise, I was given a BBQ road map for all of South Carolina and immediately put my BBQ late lunch on my to do list. So much for just yogurt and an apple sitting on the seat.

All paths are placed before us by the Lord. This includes the dead ends or even the wrong directions or turns. So today, I temporarily went the wrong way - or did I? I didn't lose my train of thought using that DVR when I spoke to then write a chapter in the book. Perhaps I would have written it anyway, but then again, you never know when, where or why the Lord sends you down His path(s).

Perhaps I was on the *Right and Righteous* path to Henry's Smokehouse on busy State Hwy 146. On the way, there were a couple of gentlemen with buckets at a busy intersection who were raising money for children. I asked one of them to come to the car so I could both donate and get a reconfirmation to Henry's Smokehouse.

When he started to walk away, I asked, "Could I please see the Proverb on the bucket?" He turned and I read "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed." from Proverbs 19:17. This morning, Pastor Frank asked and re-asked, "How can I serve my children?" Is that a coincidence that I heard and noted two verses from two different directions that related to me from places a couple hours apart? Or was it His purpose in sending be the out of way direction to remind me to stand up for those in most need. I believe it was the latter as all is God given.

August 14, 2016, June 22, 2019, and April 5, 2020

Walk the Lord's Walk

There is a saying I have heard for a long time to "walk the walk, not talk the talk." It is a phrase I have used at times but not practiced consistently as a Christian until the last decade or so.

I remember going to Chicago for the first Assisted Living conference in 1993 near Michigan Avenue in Chicago and the Nike store. Like Madison Avenue in NYC, these places do not fit my approach to buying versus shopping let alone I never had an interest in paying more for name brands. Nike had increased in popularity mostly due to its connection with Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls. I went to buy posters and buttons that stated, "Just do it." as certain members of my Company's team procrastinated too much and did not walk the walk instead of talking the talk of getting sufficient work-related tasks done.

A generation later, I see things in a similar "just do it" light and do not relate well to procrastination in general or those that talk the talk of serving and do not get around to walking

the well. When I try to be His disciple in ways with people, if the talking doesn't become walking in doing after a few attempts, I must conclude "next."

Of course, our walking God's walk is the expectation of the Lord. Unfortunately, in today's fast paced and distracted society, most Christians, companies, organizations, and too many churches are mostly just talking the talk. As Christians, we must be doers or walkers with all possible effort, leveraging our time, talents and tithing. The Lord's flock needs great pastors to teach the gospel and to lead their flocks and create disciples. Nonetheless, the Lord expects us all to be his disciples and to nurture others into discipleship as well. We need many flocks of disciples to *Walk the Lord's Walk* now more than ever.

April 20, 2016, June 22, 2019, and April 5, 2020

Studying the Word

Studying, schooling, and learning are interchangeable. I have always yearned to be learned. I have studied the Bible and the Lord's teachings dramatically more in the last 15 plus years and progressively more over the last 7-8 years as well. That includes a multi-pronged approach: i) listen to many different pastors in person, on the radio and online, ii) reading and studying the Bible on specific topics and in general, iii) reading books about faith topics but mostly about Jesus and how we should interpret scriptures and iv) researching biblical and daily life topics to understand different perspectives and interpretations from the bible. How can I do God's work in general and to be worthy of writing if I did not study the meaning and intent of the Bible on as many topics as possible?

Studying is not ways straightforward as many topics can be interpreted differently, let alone too often as the reader sees fit. As an example, societies from two to three thousand years back were very different in how they treated women or in the tolerance of slavery. Too many in America misquote scripture on these topics or otherwise. After all, *Truth Requires Context*.

As I've written, we should ask, "*What Would Jesus Do?*" in all aspects of our lives and the *New Testament in Historical Context*, the New Testament often offers many different Biblical Interpretations from the Old Testament, it is also much more pervasive in putting forgiveness, atonement and love over punishment. Hence, my study has focused on the New Testament.

My study reaffirmed that Jesus continually challenged his disciples. We must challenge ourselves, loved ones and our government to be accountable in meaningful and Biblical ways. We must be willing to shake things up a bit and be willing to be *Comfortable Being Uncomfortable*. From Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" and from Ephesians 4:25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."

While it is important to seek understanding of Biblical interpretations from different pastors, online research and/or theological study, it is just as important or more that we treat others in our daily interactions through the lens of "*What Would Jesus Do?*" Mercy, grace, compassion,

forgiveness, humbleness, giving to others, thankfulness, serving and most of all loving are the core principles Jesus demonstrated over and over. We must as well.

God loves all. From Hebrews 12:14 “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” and John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only son, whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

These verses and so many others are very clear and totally non-exclusive with words like “every effort” and “whoever” as a worthy reminder to *Love All Brothers and Sisters* and act or do for all others in demonstrating that love. May my study spark others to study what is *Right and Righteous* in the Lord.

March 2019, January 17, 2020, and March 25, 2021

Teaching with His Intent

There is a delicate balance between teaching and preaching or at least the appearance of preaching. I see myself as a reacher as much or more than a teacher and not a preacher. Therefore, for many, I can be reaching and teaching to the choir!

The Bible tells us to be disciples, so that suggests teaching with the Word in mind, which is another definition of preaching. Both preaching and teaching should be measured in *Acting Godly, or asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"*, or being both Right and Righteous. Being true to those principles with loved ones and strangers alike requires compassion, understanding, flexibility and an open mind in varied types of expression while still being humble. Like all of us, I have an obligation and responsibility to Him in *Reaching to Reach Others*.

I am reminded by what the late Neil Seldon (*Inquisitive Mind*) told me that you only have to reach (and teach) one that then reaches and teaches thousands or even millions in Him.

January 2, 2017, January 1, 2019, April 12, 2020, and March 26, 2021

Praying and Acting Purposely

I’ve heard the word “purposely” in multiple sermons over the years, perhaps never as a core topic but certainly repeated as one of several topics during a sermon. For me, the meaning of “purposely” is to plan from work to doing good works, and to a lesser degree, personally. A predominately planned life is a more purposeful and productive life, and that leaves more time for enjoyment and fun that are a combination of spontaneity and planned.

In *Four Actions to Spread Your Faith*, Pastor Ireland’s first action is to be intentional or purposely. Actions thereafter are to be expectant in results, prepared and authentic. We typically prioritize time purposely for things that are important to us. Hence, we must stay focused on what is a priority in life including serving and family at the forefront to be appropriately purposeful.

Prayers are answered more and more when our requests and conversations with the Lord are humble, worthy, authentic, open, and purposeful. Perseverance is a must, as all things worthy take time and effort including persistent prayers.

In searching for verses on purposeful, this verse came up frequently from Romans 12:2 ESV, “Do not be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Amen.

September 17, 2017, and March 26, 2021

Abilities, Value and Availability

I’ve used the term and acronym “Abilities, Value and Availability (AVA)” for many years, perhaps better entitled “value proposition based on availability and ability.” Simply put, in any relationship (business or personal) if the other party is not engaged, i.e., available as in communicating openly and being proactive in combination with their abilities, then there is no value proposition. Abilities in business can mean a proven track record as an investor or lender, or a key vendor you may need if in the retail business. Abilities personally could be someone that could help you take your craft, hobby or sport to the next level, helping a family member financially if needed, or emotionally and spiritually. Other personal abilities connected to the Lord include an innate and/or learned ability to love, act in kindness and compassion and more.

All efforts to help anyone are challenging and often not doable by the lack of true availability by most people in today’s world. Many don’t even understand that they are not available. Most that limit communication to 140 characters (and far less) in a text have reduced meaningful communication even further. We are distracted by so many things that we lose sight of the *Expectation of the Lord in Communication*.

Understanding the potential “value proposition(s)” means getting to clarity on due diligence in business or showing (written verification) versus telling (verbal only) approaches to communication in business or personal. You can’t get to a positive value proposition with two or people with abilities and availability.

We have a God that gives us free will as we balance seemingly out of balance lives. As we sort through who has both the abilities and availabilities to part or an extended part of our lives, we must stay centered on what is the truly important and valuable, including goals and efforts in giving back, family and loved ones,

June 2015, July 18, 2019, and March 26, 2021 and March 4, 2023

The Six Components of a Balanced Life

How we balance the components or priorities in our life’s changes over time, from young adults to being parents of young and then older children and to the grandparent and elder part of our lives. When I speak of a balance of six different commitments that should be in our lives, I do so as a father of three adults and as a grandfather. Life has its ebbs and flows, ups and downs and

challenges that will lead to imbalances. Yet, all six components and commitments below should be part of our lives.

1. Commitment to our faith - As mentioned in *Matthew 10:34-39 and Serving the Lord First*, our faith should be number one, understanding that it is intertwined with a commitment to family, giving back and many other aspects of our lives. A truly Godly commitment to faith means serving in all ways possible as a priority in life.
2. Commitment to our family - The commitment to family is obvious to all from an agnostic to a Christian to followers of any other religion.
3. Commitment to our spouse - From Psalms 37:4, "Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart." All things are gifts from God and are to be cherished. A spouse and loved ones are the greatest gifts.
4. Commitment to friends and fellowship - Friends become like family and great friends deserve a very similar commitment as family. From Proverbs 17:17, "A Friend lives at all times." and from Proverbs 18:24, "There is a friend that sticks closer to a brother."
5. Commitment to work - We must work to be providers for our family. Being a provider goes with the territory of being a member of a family and a committed Christian whose mission is to give back. From Acts 20:35, "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" The Lord expects us to work hard to be able to give back.
6. Commitment to time and energy for personal pursuits - Finally is finding the time and energy for each of us. While we must have joyous time with the Lord, family, our spouse, and friends, we must have "me" time as well, including but not limited to fun, laughs, solitude to pray, reflect, ponder to be certain we balance all commitments expected by the Lord.

March 25, 2019

People Are Inherently Good and Bad

I am predominantly a positive thinker in my approach to life and living and hence, I have always assumed people are inherently good. We must give the benefit of the doubt to others but still proceed with caution as we build communication and then trust in all relationships.

Some humans learn from flawed upbringings. Others are losing the battle between the Lord and devil to be both good and bad in varied extremes. Some people start their lives badly yet become consistently good; others go from middle of the road to bad to worse. The Bible and each of us have many experiences from the good and bad extremes that frames who we are or become.

Yet, the Bible tells us we are made in God's image, yet we full of flaws. From Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, sexual immortality, theft, false witness, slander." and from Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful about all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Those verses and more are reinforced by human history to remind us that we are a deeply flawed species capable of sin and horrors against others.

While people have inherently bad tendencies, they are inherently good as well. Hence, we must have blind faith only in the Lord, not in people. If fortunate, we can establish blind or absolute trust in a spouse or even a handful of those close to us as well.

From Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV), “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Even when things seem dark, the Lord is at work planning for your needs in a better future. His grace and favor are there for those that are faithful and therefore those that are good. I will continue to expect the best of people until they prove otherwise. With the Lord’s guidance, maybe I can sometimes bring out the good or even best in people along the way.

May 9-11, 2020, and March 4, 2023

Choose Life AND Doing for Those Most in Need

Humans are flawed and imperfect. The same is true for all groups and nations. We will always have those that are self-centered and don’t care about others. We will always have flawed societies favoring the haves over the have nots. In a perfect world, i.e., governments would treat all people equally. Collectively, we are usually astray from doing that is Right and Righteous.

In a world of growing divisiveness, how has or can any group, nation or nations ever get anything worthy of substance done for the disenfranchised or the masses? The simple answer is compromise, which means if two or more groups or parties do not get their way, they find a new way. Of course, compromise is also needed one on one and even that isn’t easy. How many loving relationships have ended because there was not an effort or means of compromise? Surely many and likely most.

In the U.S. and other countries, we have many groups with differing opinions or beliefs within those groups or political parties on so many topics. Some topics aren’t even of interest or important to some groups like caring for seniors for non-seniors, while other topics like immigration or healthcare are of interest to almost all even as they disagree on potential resolutions. Needs are greater for people of color, our LGBT friends, or the underemployed no matter your color, and our opinions on how let alone way to address that vary substantially.

If all were taxed appropriately, including much higher taxes on the ultra-wealthy, everyone would have free or low-cost college education and healthcare. That is Right and Righteous, as is affordable housing and access to quality housing and food for all.

In a spirit of left and right compromise, couldn’t we create a platform to improve access to education from free to low-cost education for the poor to the middle class on a sliding scale based in income, the number of dependents and Cost of Living (COL)? How about added layers of support for certain essential workers like healthcare workers, teachers, childcare providers, social workers, and mental health professionals? How about a tax plan provision where individuals and companies that endow colleges for full scholarships to those most in need receive

a tax deduction for that endowment to the underserved getting college educations so this country can truly be a great country?

The acrimony over healthcare led to so much wasted time for both the left and right versus just doing the right thing...compromise. Was Obamacare right? Likely just a good start as we can and should do better, yet we can only do better if we come together and compromise. As big and polarizing as access to college education or healthcare are in the US, there is one issue that is more polarizing...abortion. "Thou shall not kill" is one of the Ten Commandments and an obvious uniting principle for all of us no matter one's faith. If you are pregnant, how many weeks shouldn't matter. It's a child.

I believe abortion should be limited to when there are life threatening health reasons for the mother and to a lesser degree if the fetus is very abnormal. While part of me sees merit for abortion in the very early stages of pregnancy for rape and incest victims, all life if God-given and should be cherished. That said, I see a bigger picture need in a left/right political and righteous compromise to virtually eliminate abortion concurrently a with platform to provide living wages, childcare access, quality housing to education to healthcare and better food access to more to young mothers in need.

If those on the side of free choice compromised to limit abortion, why couldn't the evangelicals on the right also compromise on healthcare to college education to higher targeted taxes as mentioned in *Common Senior Q & A* even if imperfect, just far better? Possibly, with leaders that work with *Collaboration* and not divisiveness. Yes, "compromise" is a word that virtually doesn't exist in Washington, DC anymore, let alone almost everywhere else.

Again, I do not believe in abortion unless the mother's life is in danger, yet we cannot throw disproportionately poor and woman of color to the wolves of poverty. We must address extreme social-economic issues. An unjust government makes it a hardship to have and raise children for far too many, let alone more difficult for the middle class than it was for their parents.

There is room for compromise. First, abortions could be limited to pregnancies that place mother's life is at risk. Second, should a mother not want a child, she could agree to an advance to alternative adoption process and then be supported by a case worker, basic housing, healthcare, and food access and monitored through birth to assure that the mother and child in the womb are safeguarded and healthy. Adoption processes can be streamlined for what would surely be plenty of worthy parents. Plus, adoptive parents could support the pregnant mother starting early in the pregnancy through a process that matches prospective adoptive parents with birth mothers.

We never have lived in a perfect world, only a very flawed world. We can pray and dream of utopia and God's vision as such, but we must be proactively united to do what is Right and Righteous. Through collective effort, we can develop comprehensive policies to improve on so many important things to promote equality as the founding fathers intended, and more so as the Lord intends. We can and should take on all big and difficult topics, from housing to healthcare to education to abortion and more. Only then can we live in a much better and Godly world and country.

Written 2019 into 2030, substantially revised June 30, 2023

Common Sense Questions and Answers

We live in a world and country that lacks unity to such a large degree that common sense is not so common anymore. From one Googled definition, common sense is defined as “good sense and sound judgment in practical matters.” Doesn’t it seem that throughout the world, societies and governments rarely employ common sense judgment anymore? It does of course, primarily because most of the elected politicians are rooted in divisiveness.

The Bible often speaks of wisdom and understanding that require common sense. Communication that lacks honesty (including commonplace, out of context statements from politicians) is the opposite of what the Lord expects. No matter whether they lean to the left, right or otherwise, we must be reminded to *Avoid Justification Even If We are Justified*. Let’s try to apply common sense to some issues dividing our country.

Below are some of the big picture common sense questions:

1. How can any parent, grandparent or reasonable adult not be aware of the high-profile mass shootings that kill children and not take action to prevent future occurrences?

We live in a country of laws and principles, many of which were established by the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence. I respect those rights including the 2nd Amendment, but how can you compare a musket that shoots one bullet and takes time to reload when the amendment was ratified in 1791 to today’s AR-15 semi-automatic rifles? Since the Sandy Hook shootings and the prospect of legislation thereafter to virtual eliminate automatic weapons, they have increased fivefold. While we also need better weapon background checks and more mental health programs that may help deter future gun violence, that is not enough.

Common sense suggests limiting the number of firearms sold in general, let alone automatic weapons. We have the right in this country to own guns just like the free citizens of Rome did over two thousand years ago owned swords, as St. Peter most likely did as well. Common sense says it is about limiting the firearm capacity and number of firearms someone can own unless an historical collector to reduce mass shootings, not taking away gun ownership rights.

2. How can very wealthy individuals call themselves Christians and choose not to give more to those in need?

While 10% tithing is considered the norm for many, there are many affluent people with much more money than their families could spend for generations. Some, like Warren Buffett, the CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, are truly walking the giving walk as per his pledge:

“My Philanthropic Pledge - In 2006, I made a commitment to gradually give all of my Berkshire Hathaway stock to philanthropic foundations. I couldn’t be happier with that decision. Now, Bill and Melinda Gates and I are asking hundreds of rich Americans to pledge at least 50% of their wealth to charity. So, I think it is fitting that I reiterate my intentions and explain the thinking that lies behind them. First, my pledge: More than 99% of my wealth will go to philanthropy

during my lifetime or at death. Measured by dollars, this commitment is large. In a comparative sense, though, many individuals give more to others every day.”

Mr. Buffett made that pledge some time ago, but few are following his lead. A potential solution would simply be to increase federal and/or state taxes, but would the government be prudent with those additional funds? Looking at the federal debt, one may think not. Perhaps an additional solution would be a type of tax increase where the very wealthy would be mandated to pay additional funds that could be applied to specific programs or initiatives such as:

- US debt reduction.
- Waive their Social Security/Medicare financial benefits.
- Establish an adoption fund to support single pregnant women as part of an equitable and righteous, pro-life plan as mentioned in *Choose Life AND Doing for Those Most in Need*.
- Support food inequality.
- Support healthcare inequities.
- Support medical research by type.

Finding solutions requires finding common ground and common sense, and asking, “*What Would Jesus Do?*” in the Lord’s expectation of us.

June 1-13, 2023

Greed and Ego Run Amok

There are two sides to every coin – including greed and ego on one side and righteous confidence and humbleness on the other(s). In the 90’s and early in the millennium, several people in business either went behind my back, circumvented my company, or just plain stole substantial amounts of money from me. I experienced greed and ego firsthand many times, with my family incurring both direct and indirect negative consequences. Hence, I wrote about greed and ego from a different and edgy perspective at that time.

That included a concept for a live animation or cartoon show where one character, a tall, well-built blond guy was the alter ego of ego. He was as cohort and friend of an accountant who was a short, stocky guy with horn rimmed glasses and was the alter ego of greed. I envisioned their interaction with others while they were oblivious to who they were or about. Most egotistical and greedy people don’t see themselves that way and those that do would rarely admit it.

From C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* “The vice I am talking about is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility...According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

Pride is interconnected to ego, as those with big egos or opinions of themselves are boastful and full of pride. While I agree that pride and/or ego will lead to other vices, I do think the level of greed in our world has been magnified from when C.S. Lewis wrote this between 1941-44.

My increased levels of faith starting during the time of *Personal and Professional Test* and changed me for the better, and I have become more and more deeply rooted in the Lord ever since. That brought a major change in how I came to see what it means to be materialistic, greedy, or egotistical in living one's life.

I understand how you could argue that sins of the flesh have increased as a leading to end of days. You can also see that almost all nations treat certain groups as second-class citizens, including people of color, women, and immigrants. Also, greed and ego of individuals, groups and nations are leading the way in treating our planet like a disposable world just like all the disposable products. Greed and/or ego led to politicians and the wealthy trampling the rights of the masses. Hence, I believe that greed and ego collectively supersede all sins in the damage they do to our world.

Alas, we have a loving, merciful God of grace and hope. If more and more acted Godly and stood up for the iniquities in our world primarily fueled by greed and ego, so much good in Him can be accomplished for so many.

May 2017, July 2019, and March 27, 2021

End of Centuries

In my efforts to address as many important topics as possible in life and in the Bible, I am compelled to write about the end of days that I refer to as the "end of centuries." I have listened to many sermons on Revelations, yet none laid out the logical case for end of days more literally than Pastor Lloyd Pulley as referenced in *Saving Private Ryan and Revelations*. I have also heard other pastors make statements that the word "days" is relative when compared to time overall, and therefore days could be interpreted as centuries. I believe that.

While I would welcome Jesus when he arrives again, I struggle with the future world (let alone the world now) that would be left behind for my children and grandchildren since most of them are not saved nor are they ready for Jesus to come.

For me, the combination of *Greed and Ego Run Amok* is the leading reason we are in the end times. Greed and ego are connected to excess nationalism instead of embracing a Lord that expects us to love all brothers and sisters, as well as act on that love. Nationalism promotes separatism and that is ungodly.

Before and after the days that Jesus walked the planet, we always lived in an unjust world. This includes individuals justifying being unjust to others or groups of people justifying being unjust to other groups. It includes governments justification of treating certain groups of citizens differently than others and nations (and portions thereof) that justify turning away those in need.

We know in our hearts and minds what is unjust and just, what is Right and Righteous and what is or is not a godly purpose. Nonetheless, selfishness makes many if not most of us turn away from what is right and righteous (like not having excesses when others need the basics to survive and chances to thrive) in favor of ourselves. We know better. We can look within and reason what is better. We can read the Bible and know what is better. When we collectively know better, and act the opposite, we are very likely in end times.

There are many signs of the end of centuries beyond the inequities and injustices in the world like destroying the planet in many obvious and not so obvious ways. As an example, many South America and African countries rely on burning trees to cook meals for basic sustenance. As a paradox, the countries comprising the collective “haves” do not help those countries with many more “have nots” to offset the detrimental climate change path we are on. Ocean waters and temperatures will continue to rise and the air quality in much of the developed and developing world will become more toxic to breathe.

Of course, that does not mean that we as a country or any other country should not make the efforts to change and turn toward sustainable principles and renewable energy. Just last night I watched a travel show about Sweden that mentioned in the last 10 years their economy has grown 40% (a robust 4% per year). That far outpaces most larger economies including the United States. Sweden also reduced their carbon footprint by 20% during that same timeframe. With nations having different societal egos and economies tied to environmental choices, is it possible for most nations to follow the path of Sweden to offset others? Yes, even if we are not likely to ever get on the same collective page to save our planet for more than a few hundred years. Maybe, newly developed technologies may mean we can live on a hotter planet but wouldn't that be relative for the have's and have not's in an unequal world.

Again, while we are clearly on the wrong collective path in certain aspects of sinning against others and Mother Earth, perhaps the second or third leading reason to believe we are at the end of centuries are the advances in technology that are progressing at a rapid pace. First, we have nuclear weapons. Second, they are now in the possession of more and more countries. Plus, we are living in a world that is progressing from three domains of warfare (air, sea, and land) to five domains. Technology advances are leading to space warfare as the fourth domain and cyberspace as the fifth domain as referenced in the book *The Fifth Domain: Defending Our Country, Our Companies and Ourselves in the Age of Cyber Threats*. The authors make a strong case that several countries have the capability to shut down power grids of other countries, creating chaos that could spin out of control and lead to the arrival of Jesus. Add the use and misuse of artificial intelligence to that mix and we have more added sign of the end times.

I see both social media and smart phones doing more to lead to the end of days rather than being beneficial. Social and interpersonal skills are eroding. The youth suicide rate is rising. Smart phone use and social media are the leading reasons. Without knowing or seeing it, our collective ability to care for and love others has diminished.

Surely there are so many passages I could quote from Revelations that connect to things currently happening in the world, whether it be the threat of Iran to Israel, or to the Middle East. I'll leave that to pastors like Pastor Pulley.

In the movie with Keanu Reeves, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, an alien comes to bring an end to humanity because it has gone so far astray, but he realizes that humans are resilient. In God there is always hope that we can reverse courses. We have been on the precipice before like World the outbreak of War I or maybe more so World War II. Yet, there is hope for those who accept our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and act on that love.

We must all do our part in spreading the word and doing for others. We must keep reaching to reach others. Kindness, compassion and loving for all can permeate and slow the arrival of the end of times even as we wait in wonder and anticipation for Jesus to walk among us again.

July 28, September 1 and November 28, 2019; May 4, 2020; and March 27, 2021

Sermon and Church Inspired Topics

Matthew 10:34-39 and Serving the Lord First

While driving to Asheville, I heard a sermon by Pastor Alistair Begg. His Scottish accent and style make him instantly recognizable. He spoke about our obligation to serve the Lord as our only master; to do anything and everything we can from giving to sacrificing to martyring for the Lord over and above all else. Taking that one-step further, Pastor Begg spent time discussing serving the Lord over self and family.

Just three days after hearing this sermon, I went to the fast-growing Biltmore Baptist Church in Asheville. The church was opening its fifth campus, but I attended the largest in Arden. The sermon began with Matthew 10:34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” The word sword means division within a household when serving the Lord first as Matthew 10:35 continues with “...for I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - and a man’s enemies will be members of his own household.”

It’s often a conflict to serve multiple masters when there is only one. Hence, balancing relationships with family, including children let alone a spouse can be very challenging yet we must the Lord expects us to live all *Six Components of a Balanced Life*.

I have an ever-evolving mission and obligation to serve as the Lord has literally answered prayers for opportunities in His name. These opportunities do not come as winning lottery tickets. They come with sacrifice, hard work, as well as gained knowledge and wisdom. They come with doubters, tests, challenges, and issues to overcome. There are never assurances, but perseverance can lead to worthy results.

The message was further hammered home for me as Pastor Frank read in Matthew: 37-38 stating “...anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Can there be any doubt that we must love the Lord first and foremost?

The scripture reading continued into Matthew 10:39 states, “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” Finding ourselves can certainly be a long progress, but for me and most of us, *Progress is a Progress* as is the evolution.

I am thankful for all His reminders along the way, like hearing two sermons quoting Matthew 10:34-39 within just a couple of days.

October 25, 2015, June 29, 2019, and March 27, 2021

Matthew 5:4-6 and Righteousness Redefined

I've attended fifteen or so Saturday night services over the last seven plus years at Calvary Chapel led by Pastor Lloyd Pulley, with tonight's sermon on Matthew 5:4-6 from the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount that was both informative and inspiring. As Pastor Lloyd said, it was one of the greatest sermons ever and, therefore, a great topic to preach on. It was also one of many sermons I have heard centered on the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes my words are best when paraphrasing others and that is certainly the case here,

5:4 Blessed are those that mourn, for they will be comforted.

On the surface, this seems straightforward as "mourn" suggests the loss of a loved one. Pastor Lloyd asked a question I had read elsewhere: "How can mourners be comforted...or Blessed?" The answer is we are both comforted and Blessed in the gospel and in our faith. Pastor Lloyd spent some time on analogies of the ups and downs in life, even the depression that he had experienced at one time, or other moments when his faith had not been strong as life got in the way. He called those "periods of mourning" which had prompted digging deeper in Him, in cleansing, and in reaffirmations and restorations that are needed to build our faith. That connects to *The Need for Cleansing is Ongoing* written after hearing a sermon three states away.

5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Most of us, including myself, see meek as also being weak in some ways. We must be cautious in the use of words in context. Meek is a word humans dread when they are described and compared to others. Even those most deeply rooted in His mercy, grace and love that do act as Jesus acts will struggle when being referred to as meek. In the sermon, Pastor Lloyd saw meekness more as humbleness in various ways but primarily in our relationship with the Lord, including striving to be righteous as a reflection of verse 5:6 below:

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

I have used the word righteous as the measure of right in the Lord in Right and Righteous. We have free will, yet it is never too late to dig deeper in our faith and learn forgiveness, mercy, kindness and loving on deeper and deeper levels. Allow the Lord to work within us. Pastor Lloyd continued his sermon with these statements that feel like they could have been my own...if I would only be more concise at times!

- "Truly happy people are happy in righteousness," which he defined as always or almost always thinking of others and those in need and acting as Jesus would act.
- "Seek righteousness to find happiness."
- "Hunger and thirst are how we should approach being righteous on an ongoing basis" as in being more like Christ.
- My lows as a Christian are higher than the highs of a non-Christian."

I am thankful for a thirst for learning on how to be more righteous than right every day with everyone in my life and for all the reminders to do so.

February 10, 2018, May 5, 2020, and March 28, 2021

Four Actions to Spread Your Faith

In 2012, Pastor David Ireland gave a wonderful sermon at Christ Church in its Morris County location on each of these four things that people of faith should do to spread their faith:

1. Be Intentional (Purposeful)
2. Be Expectant (expecting results)
3. Be Prepared
4. Be Authentic

We must be purposeful in all aspects of our lives, including *Praying and Acting Purposely*. For me, that means an organized and planned life to use our God given time judiciously and purposely. As I concluded, *Prayer is Integral to Important Consideration(s) and Decision(s)*, “We must pray purposely and repeatedly, and openly with our Lord.”

Most of us have many stated and unstated goals that should not be mistaken for purpose. Many procrastinate and state they plan on acting, but never get the needed action plan(s) on their plate. In my work and fellowship efforts, so many say they are interested in getting something done, but not many get to the details so that means more effort is needed. Inaction is a type of talk the talk versus walk the walk, namely being proactive. We must be purposeful and persistent and keep *Reaching to Reach Others*.

I juggle a lot of things, but I typically don’t put more on my plate than I can eat, just as I hope to eat at the Lord’s Table more often. I may not be as prepared as I should be, but I humbly state that I am more prepared than most. I live a prepared and expectant life in fellowship and the Lord to make and seize the opportunities He grants me.

The fourth principle expressed by Pastor Ireland was to “be authentic.” With my personal email screen name “Real Tim” since the infancy of the Internet, that suggests that I have long been more open and transparent than most. However, an authentic Christian openly expresses his or her faith with kindness, mercy and without judgement in virtually any type of interaction, including business to personal and all in between. I prayerfully continue to a *Progress is a Process* in that regard.

God and the Bible tell us that we should be disciples here on earth, spread the word, and help others as much as possible. Be open. Be humble. Be communicative. Be Loving. Be purposeful and planned. Be all these things and more as authentically as you can.

March 18, 2012, July 19 and November 27, 2015, and March 28, 2021

Psalm 102 and Beyond Coincidence

Like almost every Sunday at RHCP, I take the Bible from the back of the pew, open it randomly, close my eyes and point my finger at a passage to see if it resonates. Since I have been doing so for a while, finding new inspirations versus reiterations can be challenging. Plus, life gets in the way of seeing the true inspirations or the message the Lord tries to send us at times.

Since we have *Do Over God*, today I opened the Bible a second time to Psalm 102 and more specifically randomly put my finger on Verse 28, “The children of your servants will live in your presence. Their descendants shall be established before you.” I initially struggled with the passage and the reference to servants, even understanding that in Biblical times, most people literally had servants. I struggled again to see if I had found a connection in my life. I closed the Bible, and listened to the sermon that was centered on over 30 verses from the Book of John.

Ten minutes later, I did something I do not think I have ever done, namely open the Bible randomly for a third time on the same church visit. I have lived a life of sometimes bizarre coincidences. However. Today was not really a coincidence because as we know, there are no coincidences when God is at work, and He is present in everything in our life. So, what was different today? I opened that Bible to the same exact page and pointed to the same verse for the third time! It startled me so I checked and there were no tabs, earmarks, or frayed pages that led me to that page, further confirming Lord led me there. The question is why?

I stepped back for context. Psalm 102:1 begins with “Hear my prayer Lord; let me cry for help, come to you; let me cry for help, come to you.” 2 mentions crying out in distress while Verse 5 again mentions the distress in the prayer to God through Verse 11, which states, “My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass” where we see the frailty that we have as humans. We are just a blip in time. In Verse 12, there is a shift in the message stating, “But you, Lord sit enthroned forever; your renown endures for generations.”

Psalm 102 continues with praise of the Lord in many passages before coming to another conclusion in Verse 24, “So I said: “Do not take me away, my God in the midst of my days; your years go on through generations.” Many times, including *A Prayer for Time (for Jean and I)*, I have asked God for more time and more strength to do His work, and got that reminder.

When I came home, I read Psalm 102 in its entirety over and over and kept returning to Verse 24 as the verse God choose for me that day. I know the long odds of finding the same verse back to back to back is God at work. I am energized, reaffirmed and will continue to ask God for that added time to do good works and be there for family for Right and Righteous reasons.

March 26, 2017, July 18, 2019, and March 28, 2021

The Message of Hope is Why I am a Christian

I had Monday AM meetings scheduled near Hartford so found one the oldest churches in New Haven (and New England) on the way to attend Sunday. The United Christ on the Green church was rather large for an older church, maybe seating a thousand people on two floors. The size

made the sparse crowd of fifty seem smaller, including some homeless people from the two dozen tents nearby as well as some of the Occupy Wall Street participants in New Haven. The congregation dated to 1639, even before Christ Church in Philadelphia that I visited recently. This second church on the green was built in 1812. While the two-story interior was similar in shape to the 315-year-old Christ Church, the woodwork was much more intricate.

The sermon on the topic of hope wasn't long, but it was very meaningful. Reverend Dr. Sandra Olsen first spoke of Churchill and his message of faith against all odds early in the war; and then moved on to speak about Isaiah and Mark. She mentioned initially leaving the Church of Christ to become a Unitarian, and her being a young chaplain at a psychiatric hospital with residents that had lobotomies before psychotropic drugs. She had struggled to find hope as a chaplain then.

A chaplain there convinced her that she must have hope for today and the future. That led her back to the Church of Christ in New Haven, becoming the Reverend that she expected to be for so many years. She concluded, "Simply put, the message of hope is why I am a Christian." That resonated for me, as in one sentence it spoke of why I have always had faith to eventually increasing degrees.

The parishioners were invited for coffee and homemade baked goods afterward. With such a small crowd, I was able to speak with Dr. Olsen for a while. I began by telling her how that single sentence from her sermon summed up why I am a Christian. Since I was a guest, she asked where I was from and about my family. When I told her Freehold, NJ, her eyes widened, "Really! My brother lives there and raised three children there as well."

I replied, "I have three children, but they were raised nearby." She continued that she had other family that had retired in Barnegat, and I responded, "My children's grandparents live there." The coincidences seemed beyond coincidences. That prompted me to shift direction and mention how I had been attending historical churches recently, including two in Philadelphia that had recently increased the size of their congregations with most people commuting from the suburbs to these old city places of worship. She responded there are many United Church of Christ congregations in New Haven and its suburbs, and that her church was fortunately very well endowed. She was at peace with the small audience not to infringe on those other congregations so to speak.

I might not have understood how she could be at peace just a few years ago. Nonetheless, I do now. The message of hope is a driving force as the Christian I have become. I know the signs in our societies seem to be going the wrong direction, but I believe and have hope for myself, my family and mankind.

November 27, 2011, and June 23, 2019

Rooted in Him and Choices

I attended a new church (for me) with a new, deeply rooted Christian friend, Kim Bradford. Pastor Richard Gay of Central Church in Ewing, NJ was beginning a series on "Rooted" and the added importance during times of uncertainty, including two recent huge hurricanes and so many

worldwide issues. “How many once in a thousand-year weather events must we have before we act on climate change and take action” was one question he asked.

Pastor Gay said early in his sermon, “God loves you unconditionally. Nothing you can do for good or bad will increase or lessen His love for you.” Wow, we sure have a God of grace!

“It is our choice to take action for the better good,” Pastor Gay continued. The “better good” must be examined, and that will come in time. Everything we do is a choice. We choose to communicate openly, withdraw, or deflect. We choose to allow His spirit within and channel that Holy Spirit and therefore be joyful and happy in our lives, understanding we must be thankful for all the choices granted. We can choose the opposite too.

We are given many opportunities in life, including serving, being there for family or fellowship, and to love Him. Choices should be made from the heart and soul after prayer and thoughtfulness. Choices must not be made with justification, but be rooted in love, compassion, and His grace.

Pastor Gay continued into Luke 19:38-42, the story of Martha and Mary in meeting Jesus. In Luke 10:41-42, Martha had been demanding of Jesus in stating to the Lord, “Tell her to help me!” The Lord answered, “Martha, Martha you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him.

Just this week I wrote *Calming to Peace to Joy to Happiness* where in calming research, I saw dozens of passages showing the Lord does not want us to be troubled, worried or have anxieties.

The Pastor continued what is important in our lives and in Him by quoting Corinthians 4:18, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” This is an ultimate big picture statement unto Him, but it applies to our daily lives as well. In our choices, we must remember what is important and that material things are meaningless without loving in our life.

September 10, 2017, April 2, 2020, and March 28, 2021

The Value of Obedience

No matter our faith or lack of it, most of us share many core values and beliefs. Most of these are instilled by our parents, including love first and foremost as well as the need for respect and obedience. We usually learn these by the time we reach the age of reason, typically 6-7 years old, while we learn much of what is right or wrong as young as a toddler.

Yesterday my thoughts turned to obedience after going to see *The Lion King* with my daughter Katie and my two grandchildren, Audrey, who is almost 2-1/2, and Olivia, almost 5. The movie didn't catch as much of their attention as *Toy Story 4*, because it was a surreal kind of animation instead of a cartoon. The adventures of Woody, Little Bo Peep and the gang are much more rapid

fire and fun. Fortunately, we had four big theater seats without another row in front of us, which made it much easier when Audrey became restless and too talkative.

We emerged from the theater with Katie feeling frustrated due to Audrey's lack of obedience. Indeed, over the last six months or more, Audrey has gained great pleasure in being disobedient and defiant over basic requests. Part of me knows it's just a phase yet I also know there are many influences in their lives. Katie shares the kids with her ex for one weekend day every week and works full time which results in many childcare influences. She also has lapses in discipline at times, which is all too common with the juggling of life. It isn't easy, and I'm reminded of *A New Found Appreciation for Mothers*.

Conflicts and efforts to discipline have frequently occurred in our family. Katie's mom was very inconsistent when applying discipline, particularly with Chris. This led to many issues between us as they grew up. Eventually they understood and respected requests for obedience from both of us, but more so from me based on a "No means no" policy. Chris was younger and grew up loving his mother dearly yet was often disobedient and disrespectful. Hence, his overall maturity took longer. The important thing is that he has now reached a good, often great place as a disciplined and responsible almost 27-year-old.

The day after seeing *The Lion King*, I left home at 6AM and attended Living Waters Church in Harrisburg, PA as I headed out on a long trip into the Midwest and further west. This was the third time I had visited this church after previously trying another church in Harrisburg that made me uncomfortable. From my first visit, I had been very comfortable at Living Waters, which had grown under the leadership of Pastor Mike and other disciples to bring many people back to the church as well as embrace God's expectation of us to *Love All Brothers and Sisters*.

Sometimes there are ironies in God's plan. For example, today's sermon was entitled "Disasters of Disobedience" as part of a longer series. The pastor began with a non-Christian example of a little girl who enjoyed being defiant before she knew better. One day a gate was left open, and the child continued to run away when her parents called her, and she was tragically hit by a car. As parents, we are here to love and protect, but we can only come close to full protection when children are obedient.

Pastor Mike's sermon mentioned "with disobedience comes pain" and included several examples from scripture. He focused on Genesis including Genesis 31:3, "Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.'" Jacob disobeyed the Lord and his family, including his daughter Dinah, suffered immensely.

Pastor Mike also stated, "Often when we disobey the Lord, it is for a selfish purpose," and continued with examples from scripture. When you are selfish, you can easily disobey and suffer the consequences. Selflessness is most often a learned trait that for many, including myself, takes many years or decades to fully understand and practice regularly.

From Ephesians 6:1-3 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth." We do have a God of *Absolute*

Forgiveness. We can repent and be forgiven when we are disobedient to the Lord, and this should be true for parents as well. We are usually Blessed with time to heal including a need for learned obedience, time to learn how to live a Godly life, and how to be a better parent and grandparent as well.

July 28, September 1, and November 28, 2019, May 3, 2020

Repentance to God, Others and Ourselves

This topic has been on my mind for some time. I was reminded to write this after reading a chapter in Pastor David Ireland's book, *One in Christ (Bridging Racial and Cultural Divides)*. As I hopefully convey in *Studying the Word*, reading the Bible, hearing worthy sermons, and reading interpretations of the Bible by pastors I respect like David Ireland helps me to clarify and codify my expressions. This was certainly the case in reading from Chapter Three Defining Moments - Repentance Is an Act of Humility including his statements below:

- "Repentance must be seen as a positive act and not a negative one. Repentance is a change of view. It's not simply mourning over the past. It is a joyful look to the future."
- "Repentance will help rebuild the bonds of trust."
- "Don't be afraid to repent if you need to. Repentance is a game-changer. It's a gift from God to you."

These quotes are references to Galatians 2:13 and how Peter squared things with the congregation at Antioch, in effect repenting to the entire congregation. Repentance is important for healing for pastors, leaders, and all of us.

In Dictionary, repenting means "sincere regret or remorse" while to forgive means "to stop feeling, angry or resentful toward (someone) for an offense, flaw or mistake." Repentance and forgiveness usually seem the same to Christians when we speak of our God. For me, and I suspect most Christians, when we ask God for forgiveness, we also ask for repentance. When a relationship (personal to professional) has gone astray, forgiveness and repentance are needed. It is always best to be humble, self-effacing, apologetic, and repent (as in offer and seek forgiveness) in an effort to prompt the same. That communication can lead to closure, and closure results in healing and is righteous.

When we offer forgiveness, we can ease the burden off our minds as much as the person we forgive. Nonetheless, when there is also repentance in the mix, the power of that forgiveness is multiplied.

May 28, 2018, June 22, 2019, and March 28, 2021

Saving Private Ryan and Revelations

As a renovation of warehouse space, Calvary Chapel in Old Bridge, NJ is more nondescript than any of the largest places of worship I had been to when first visited and speaks to a humbleness that is Godly to me. Pastor Lloyd Pulley is sincere, smart, straightforward, eloquent, believable and a teacher as well as a preacher.

In 1998, I was heading home from a meeting in Philly and took the non-highway route, stopped, and saw the movie *Saving Private Ryan* at a 5PM showing. It was believable and real, as well as brutal and bloody. From the inception, it drew you in and your stomach turned and twisted as you saw the brutality of war. I left the movie numb and numbness didn't end until I woke up the next morning. To a lesser degree, a few years later, the movie *Million Dollar Baby* also left me with that feeling.

Tonight, I felt a similar but worse numbness because Pastor Lloyd is so factual and believable, and his sermon presented a stark future for non-believers. I know as a Christian I am supposed to embrace all in the Bible and therefore all that the Lord has in store, but realities like the end of time are a bit scary and more so when placed within the contexts of my children not collectively walking His walk.

The Pastor had preached a series of sermons in *Revelations* for almost a year. In this sermon, he summed up many sermons. He usually covered by far more passages in the bible on those big screens at a faster pace than any Pastor I ever saw, and tonight was much more so, with many connections to the Euphrates River area, the Middle East, oil as the shift of power to biblical places and passages, Iran (Persia) and the plans of a dictator with eventual nuclear power.

There was so much connected to passages in *Revelations* that would lead to the death of half of humanity and plagues for much of the rest of us. I welcome His coming, but for many family members and so many more that are not fully saved, these thoughts also numb the senses. During the sermon, only once did he inject a bit of levity to trigger the most nervous laughter I have ever heard as you could hear a proverbial pin drop during the entire sermon.

I paid attention as intensely as I have to any sermon, but more so to note and follow so much logical information. I see the biblical analogies and more like how we are using up the planet resources and know that *Greed and Ego Run Amok*, how the misplaced majority are focused on our differences not our similarities in societies let alone in people, how out of control population growth continues, how nuclear weapons will eventually get into the wrong hands and so much more suggest that we are in the end of days or *End of Centuries*.

I also believe God is a God of hope and that collective faith of humanity that has had its ebbs and flows of evils and sins to more hopeful times over millennia. Wake up calls for humanity are evident in the Bible and there have been many turning points in history as well.

I recall a guest pastor at Calvary Chapel in a prior sermon that said to be wary of believing all things as messages from God. I took that into account after service when I ran into Pastor Pulley in the hall soon thereafter. We made eye contact and shook hands as we chatted briefly. As we

grasped hands, I experienced a heat flash like nothing I can ever recall. Maybe that was just residual numbness from the sermon, but maybe an added layer of message from the Lord.

August 27, 2012, and March 5, 2023

Paul and Timothy... Lessons in Discipleship

I am inspired to write this today after hearing Pastor Seth's sermon entitled "Persisting in the Promises." Pastor Seth reminded me that Paul wrote in the form of letters, including the two to Timothy among what are referred to as the Pauline Epistles. Paul's other letters include First Thessalonians, Galatians, First Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Second Corinthians, and Romans, all believed to have been written from c. 50 AD to c. 57 AD in that order.

Pastor Seth referenced many books of the Bible from Acts to Corinthians in which Timothy was mentioned as a disciple and Paul's friend. Paul knew what a blessing it was to create, build and teach disciples, but he also had so many other reasons to be blessed and fulfilled during what he knew were his last days. From <https://disciplr.com/timothy-facts-lessons>, one of the author's (Dan Loy) four highpoints from "64 biblical facts and lessons from the life of Timothy," he states, "In later years, Timothy served as Paul's emissary at various locales, where the apostle has established churches on his missionary journeys." Another message from Paul and Timothy's relationship is to be as open and expressive.

As Pastor Seth mentioned, 2 Timothy, including 2 Timothy 4:1-18, was probably written shortly before Paul was likely beheaded by the Romans. Pastor Seth covered portions of the longer than typical reading at RCHP, but he didn't mention 2 Timothy 4:2-5 that states, "2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them in great numbers of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, so the work of an evangelist, discharge the duties of your ministry." While Paul expressed this to Timothy, it continues to be true today for all His disciples, hopefully including me more and more. Timothy was indeed an extension of Paul, just like Neil, Pastor Franco and many others have been or are currently extensions of Pastors Seth, Stephanie, and our church. I have been blessed with disciples in my life even when I didn't know that was the case, like Gene as referenced in *The Presence of God and His Disciples* as a prime example. We must never grow weary or too comfortable and forget to both seek and cultivate new disciples in our expressions of our faith and our doing for others.

When I left the sanctuary, I said to Pastor Seth, "Great sermon. I pray you find Timothy(s) in your life as Paul did." I caught him off guard, as I do with him and others at times and he responded, "I already have a Timothy in my life, you." It was a kind and well-meaning comment, spoken quickly and therefore literal versus the symbolism intended.

Paul was the ultimate disciple. They magnified the words, messages, and love of Jesus. I am thankful for the lessons and reminders to do my best to be a disciple in every way possible.

October 27th and November 28, 2019

Creating Disciples

On Sunday, November 15, 2015, I attended the service at North Rock Hill Church in Rock Hill, SC. The church is very contemporary in design, yet basic and not ostentatious with a young congregation. The church had clearly grown from messages of fellowship and discipleship and was somewhat new, yet it was crowding three services into each Sunday. The pastor, Jay Hardwick, had only been there since January 2012.

Pastor Hardwick mentioned that there are more than 40,000 missionaries in the middle of the globe, which includes the troubled areas in the Middle East, North Africa and into Asia. He went on to mention there are 2 million US citizens working within the area and that if only 10% of them became open, expressive Christians or disciples of the Lord like missionaries, there would be 200,000 additional disciples or five times the number of disciples in the region currently.

North Rock Hill Church's mission as expressed in a large font size on their web site is "We pursue our vision by multiplying disciples for the glory of God." That summed up the sermon, and my hopeful ongoing and increasing efforts to cultivate disciples to do His work.

November 16, 2015, and April 2, 2020

The Need for Cleansing is Ongoing

Today I visited a new church (for me), Bridgeway Community Church in Columbia, MD, with Dr. David Anderson the lead pastor, who had a great delivery and sense of humor. The sermon began with a discussion of chapters about Sheerah, the builder of three cities between Jericho and the Mediterranean. Sheerah like all developers, had to address the ugly when building the beautiful. The pastor continued with perhaps too many examples of sanitation being part of that like the garbage bins behind the church that are shielded from view. The pastor eventually moved on to a discussion of cleansing and drew connections to his colonoscopy resulting in some nervous laughs from the congregation. When he got into cleansing, he had two key points:

1. The obvious point is we need to be cleansed from our sins, which begins with repentance and then receiving the Lord's forgiveness.
2. When we go through a tough time in our life, we need to be made anew through prayer and conversation(s) with the Lord to be cleansed, in effect refreshed and continually reborn in our relationship with the Lord.

We must not be influenced by the cynicism from both non-believers and believers that are out of balance in a world gone astray. In all types of relationships, I try my best to avoid making assumptions about people, to give them the benefit of the doubt, to pray for the Right and Righteous possibilities of that relationship. That said, we must also be cleansed from bad

relationships to have truly great relationships going forward. Cleansing is indeed a key component of healing to then being able to be proactive in doing for others and yourself.

August 21, 2016, and April 12, 2020

Being Contrite is a Blessing

Pastor Lloyd of Calvary Chapel is a biblical teacher, and he started tonight in Romans 5 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

We tend to relate to passages and sermons that apply to our life, and tonight was no different. He continued that if you cannot treat others with kindness, mercy, and grace in loving, you are sinning in His eyes and need to seek His forgiveness. Amen, I said after that worthy reminder.

He also reminded me that in seeking or offering forgiveness, we need to be contrite and acknowledge we have done wrong to those individuals, i.e., repent. He continued, “Being contrite to others when we have wronged and sinned is a Blessing, not a burden.” This was a wow moment for me leading to *Being Contrite is a Blessing*, something I have tried to convey many times to several that are close to me.

The Pastor also spent some time talking of the sin of bearing false witness, how pervasive lying is in society today and how those trickles down directly and indirectly to each of us. He continued about how so many of us cannot be truthful with ourselves. When we are prideful rather than selfless, we see ourselves in a skewed and untruthful light. When we cannot acknowledge or admit wrongdoing or sin by not being truthful with ourselves and therefore others, how can we be absolved? The answer is that we cannot.

His message tonight was consistent with Pastor Dr. David Ireland’s sermon mentioned in *Repentance to God, Others and Ourselves*. Repentance goes one step further than being contrite. We need to repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness, sometimes over and over.

We go through bad times, so we will slip and slip again. But we must pray openly, recognize how we stray from Him, and then reconcile the wrongs as best as possible. Living the Right and Righteous way isn’t easy, but reminders and practice make us less imperfect.

October 21, 2017, June 19, 2019, and April 5, 2020

Macedonia Baptist Church and the Promise

Today I attended service at the Macedonia Baptist Church in Albany. It was the 26th anniversary of the Church's founding by Rev. Leonard Comithier and the one-year anniversary of its relocation to what seems like a 1950's to early 60's era Catholic Church and school. While on this anniversary, there may have been more energy from the pastor, music, and members, but there is no doubt the energy and exuberance on this Fall 2012 day were at the highest level. With one exception, I was the only person without color in the well-attended service, a statement only for frame of reference for the story to follow.

The couple hundred or so in attendance included a choir of 18 with only a couple of men, supported and bolstered by just a piano player. His blues style rivaled any pianist in any of my extensive collection of old and new blues CD's or from my many stops in Memphis. He had a boogie-woogie style at times, standing much of the time pounding the keys hard yet softened in extended stretches to let the choir be the lead. I quickly decided I would introduce myself after the sermon and ask where he played locally. After five songs, I was convinced he was one of the best piano players if not the best (for me) I had ever seen, and that included the not-yet-known Billy Joel in a piano bar when I was just turning 19 or Johnnie Clyde Johnson in the Bay Area.

The third song featured two women in their 20's or 30's, alternating the lead and singing together. The song spoke of overcoming one's "yesterday(s)" and of the promises and hopes resulting from faith in the Lord for the tomorrows, regardless of the challenges of the past. It was clearly meaningful to the singers and resonated with all including me. One of the singers came forward after the song ended and provided testimony in overcoming challenges. I admittedly hung on to every word. Their style was more so jazz with tinges of gospel or R&B. I also have a large jazz CD collection and can say this singing performance rivaled Cassandra Wilson live or even approached Etta or Ella. It was the best jazz vocal performance I had heard live since a Blue Note visit to the Village at least six to seven years ago.

The audience joined in on the classic hymn "God Will Take Care of You" before the reverend spoke. As many pastors do, he had a rhythm to his delivery and an increasing crescendo and loudness, only more than any other pastor I had ever seen at that point. Two deacons behind him alternated between popular deep baritones of "ah hum's," "Preach Pastor Preach!", or "That's right!" The audience reveled and I did too, as there were many great messages preached feverishly and passionately from perseverance with the Lord's guidance to the message of hope.

When the sermon was over, there was one last song as the Reverend went row by row to embrace and bless everyone in the chapel. Thereafter, many exchanged blessings with me as I crossed the width of the chapel to greet the piano player. When I got close, I was surprised to discover a man likely in his mid-70's. I asked my question I had been holding for well over an hour, "Is there anywhere locally I can hear you play on your own or with your group?" I asked.

"No, I only play in church," he answered.

"Really?" I exclaimed in shock.

“Yes. My grandmother thought my music style was the devil’s music. I promised her when I was five years old that I would only play in church,” he continued.

I thanked him and walked away shaking my head a bit, at first thinking what a shame that so few have heard such a talented man, but then I quickly praised the Lord for his 65 years of music inspiring so many, even if just in churches. My thoughts then turned to my mother and the story she inspired before she passed *A Promise is a Promise*. Indeed, it is!

November 18, 2012, July 21, 2019, and January 17, 2020

Epiphanies

Today, the first Sunday in the New Year at RCHP is Epiphany Sunday and it was the topic of today’s sermon by Pastor Seth. “Epiphany is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. It celebrates the visit of the Magi to the Christ child and thus Jesus’ physical manifestation to the Gentiles.” according to Wikipedia and part of the sermon intro. He also included some examples including how someone found the church web site and had an epiphany after reading a message that was heartfelt just the night before. Pastor Seth’s example goes to the definition that an epiphany is something that occurred or was revealed to us that was enlightening, a lifting of a burden, finding a new and true understanding and seeing the Lord’s purpose...all rolled into one.

In 2004, I had an epiphany that I was falling short in my faith because I was not forgiving to all. As mentioned in *Stories of Forgiveness*, I reconciled with others and myself. A weight was lifted. In 2007 into 2010, as written in a *Test in a New Light*, I had perhaps my largest epiphany in seeing His Blessing versus a “why me” approach to become a relative hardship.

We have many choirs, musicians, and singers in RCHP, and many styles and types of music ranging from bluegrass to jazz to gospel to classical and all in between. However, today was both different and unique with a song sung in one of many languages from the Congo by members of the congregation to thank the church for helping them find a home through the church housing authority and much more. “Home” has many meanings in that regard. Many of their family members died during warfare and they were forced to migrate to a tent encampment for many long years. A brother sang with his wife and sister, with three small siblings in tow. They had been separated for long stretches, with hunger and starvation a way of life, but they sang this song every day to remember that the Lord had a better place for them. Each of these family members had epiphanies that sustained them in very hard times.

As I said to Pastor Seth when leaving church after his sermon, “May we all have many epiphanies.” We must have an open heart, soul, and mind to embrace all the possibilities in Him, and we must be purposeful in fellowship and communication to be in position to have many epiphanies.

January 6, 2019, and January 12, 2020

Prayer is Integral in Consideration(s) and Decision(s)

All important decision(s) require substantial thought, reflection and prayer. While attending Middle Tree Church in St. Louis in August 2016, I was given a book *A Praying Life (Connecting with God in a Distracted World)*. It has been inspirational.

For several years, I prayed every day and/or night for the Lord to Bless me with opportunities so I could give back in His name. In mid-2015, these prayers shifted to thanking the Lord for the opportunities given in the past and those before me and to grant me the strength, will, fortitude, understanding and other important tools to make these opportunities happen in His name. *A Prayer for Time (for Jean and I)* was written around this time.

I am driven to give back in the Lord's name, and to be there in varied ways for my family. It gives me energy and provides focus even through discomforts. I rethink paths, options, and decisions before me and pray for the balance of family, fellowship and work. As I wrote in *Matthew 10:34-39* and *Serving the Lord First*, my mission is first for the Lord with my family close behind. I so cherish my time with my children and my grandchildren, and I look forward to future time(s).

Yes, prayer is integral when considering important decision(s) of all kinds. We must pray purposely, repeatedly, and openly with our Lord.

August 16, 2016, December 23, 2017, and June 22, 2019

The Real Prosperity Message

I have always sought to learn and understand many different types of things. As my faith increased. I find lots of ways in *Studying the Word* from a societal standpoint and for churches that are the steward of God's word and actions.

Personal and Professional Test discussed the challenges when I was put into a position by God (together with others) to help many. Yet, when I first wrote that in 2006, I was not yet a regular church goer. My friend Earleen prompted me to return to church, starting at Faith Fellowship in Sayreville, NJ in 2007. I became a semi-regular there, more for the inspiring music and less often for the sermons. God brings us to places for His own reasons and then allows us to grow and evolve. That was the case here as I was attracted to the power of the music literally reaching my soul, the fellowship between the congregation, the many good Christians I met there and in giving back, yet the sermons contained "prosperity messages" that to me were too self-serving and excessive.

Through research, I came to understand that while Christianity and churches face challenges in membership, the growth of Christianity was mostly in non-denominational churches and that a substantial percentage of the larger and/or newer churches included pastors whose central theme was the prosperity message. In a troubled world, or at least one that feels more troubled due to expanded media access that focuses on bad news, people need hope in a variety of ways and

often connect more with a prosperity message. If that gets them back in a church doing God's work, then that is a mixed blessing yet still is a blessing.

In 2015 in North Carolina, I heard a sermon mainly centered on miracles with many references to a "God of Increase." The pastor had six or seven stories, as he rallied the congregation on how the church needed funds for some purpose and an actual check arrived after the need arose. The pastor made the connection indirectly or directly to miracles on almost every example. However, miracles are not connected to a check. As he continued, I had to fight the urge to leave the service early. They are rare and extra special. They do occur in miraculous recoveries from health related and other mostly life-threatening issues.

I do know is that I have been Blessed with every new day; with my children and their health and happiness; with each opportunity, particularly opportunities to give back in magnificent ways. I have been Blessed many thousands of times, even as there are *Relative Blessings to Miracles*.

God wants us to do good works, and to live humbly as we give back, and not live for material possessions defining prosperity, but on behalf of our family and those in need.

August 28, 2015, and edited July 9, 2019

The Last Are First

Pastor Seth of RCHP ran for New Jersey governor as a Green Party candidate in the November 2017 election. Yes, he only received about 10,000 votes, but many still heard him and his messages and that was his goal, including his platform, "The Last Are First." I never asked him, but I suspected Matthew 20:16, "So the last will be first, and the first last" is a verse that is close to his heart.

I attended a Saturday evening service at Christ Church on December 2nd shortly after the election. David Ireland, the lead pastor, was not there but Pastor Faison delivered a great and timely message for me. Pastor Faison told a very entertaining story of how hard it was to go from kindergarten to first grade, which he claimed was the biggest adjustment of his life. First, he went from getting naps to having no naps. On the first day, his teacher asked all to stand in line for lunch. Everyone hustled and shoved to be first in line. Then the teacher told everyone to turn around and the last was indeed first so those that were pushed aside were prompted forward.

The sermon then continued with a reading of Matthew 20:1-16, the story or parable leading to the conclusion "last are first."

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

3 "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'

5 So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

7 “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

9 “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.

10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

12 ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

13 “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’

14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.

15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

The scripture is a parable where the Lord is speaking to Peter with an example of how to act as the Lord would act. In effect, the landowner is the Lord, and therefore a lesson in *Acting Godly or asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"* Secondly, despite grumblings from those that started early in the day versus those worked an hour to get the same pay, all should have been thankful, as all worked by the grace of the landlord (or God in the parable) and all had no work, no money, and little means prior to any work.

It is also important to note that those who worked initially knew what they were going to earn and in effect had a contract while those that worked later did so without knowledge of what they would receive in return. Therefore, those that worked later did so without knowledge of any reward, and in effect were worthier. Hence, the last became first in this parable.

The last are indeed the first of the Lord, and we are supposed to act and do for others with that in mind.

December 2, 2017, and June 29, 2019

Relative Blessings Versus Miracles

God works miracles throughout the Bible, many of which are healing related. I recently heard a sermon by Pastor Tim Rivers at the Embassy City Church in Irving, TX. He is the relatively new lead pastor there, with Pastor Tim Ross (the founding Pastor), stepping aside. Also, as a Tim, my thoughts wavered between that of being a coincidence or God’s purpose before the clarity that all is His purpose, as well as don’t read into or react too much about His unknown purposes.

Pastor Tim gave many examples of how “humanity and divinity intercept” in prayer and actions and God intercepts your life in important ways: “He is a supernatural miracle, so we are living, talking, breathing miracles.” He further made a great case that “Jesus healed the sick, and someone was healed when he or others laid hands.” If someone was healed in the Bible, and healing in the same way in or as part of our lives, why wouldn’t both be miracles?” That made logical sense until further thought and prayer.

Healing miracles in the Bible go far beyond Jesus healing the sick and blind. From Psalm 147.3: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” The word “brokenhearted” is just one example that implies physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and other types of healing. Every day when we reach out in kindness, grace, and love for others, we are working the processes of healing. We are blessed to reach out to someone, and they are blessed to be reached, even in small ways like a sincere “*How are you?*” in customer service situations when I try to channel Neil Seldon’s message mentioned in *An Inquisitive Approach to Love and Life*.

Are blessings and miracles interchangeable and therefore one and the same? Everything is a relative blessing, including each moment or breath. Of course, some blessings are of much greater magnitude, like the birth of a healthy child or recovery from an illness. I believe blessings are like the Richter earthquake scale where each single digit increase (like from seven to eight) is ten times more powerful. While we all are, or all can be His disciples in ways of varying degrees, we are acting on His behalf. I see those as blessings of relative substance, not miracles.

Listening to the very compelling sermon made me rethink what I had written about a potential miracle in *Personal and Professional Test*. It became clear it was instead a combination of blessings in the 9 range or higher on the Richter Blessing Scale so to speak. I will continue to do my best to count my countless blessings, be thankful every day for the blessings of health and happiness for family, and reserve miracles for the Lord.

February 13, 2023, and March 15, 2023

Seize the Opportunity for Racial Redemption

On Sunday June 7, 2020, I listened to Alistair Begg’s sermon centered on Romans 8:18-21, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subject to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought to freedom and glory of the children of God,” subtitled “Present Suffering and Future Glory” in the Bible.

Pastor Begg’s sermon began with this preface and question: “Illness, earthquakes, economic downturn...Can a good, loving God truly be at work in such tragic circumstances?” I had done my best to answer this question some six weeks before when concluding all is God-given in *COVID-19: Lamenting Versus an Urge for Christian Rationalism*.

I am writing this just six days after three additional policemen were charged with “aiding and abetting second degree manslaughter” in George Floyd’s murder. Many and perhaps most of us sighed in relief, even if for different reasons, for too many. I believe I am not a racist in any way, shape, or form. That said, there have been moments in my life when I prejudged others because of their nationality. I have repented and changed for the better.

In my past, I have prejudged others, black, white and all in between, based on their educational background or lack of it even as others have done the same to me because my seven years of college with major indecisively meant I do not hold a degree. Not giving anyone a full and equal opportunity in business or personal interactions for education or socioeconomic reasons is a form of prejudice. I have repented and changed for the better.

In the last 17 years, I have progressively dug deeper in *Studying the Word* to ask what Jesus would do. I try to see all things in His light and His expectations of in us In *Loving All Brothers and Sisters*, I express that the Lord does not see an iota of difference between any of us and we are to act as He acts.

We must recognize prejudice and inequality to become progressively less racist or hopefully not be racist at all. We are human, so we are imperfect, all of us white, black or the so-called in between. Therefore, we stumble in how we treat others no matter who they are, even those we love most. Hence, we must be perpetually cognizant of what is Right and Righteous to take the moral high road.

There can’t be redemption, i.e., healing for right and righteous reasons, without repentance. You can’t repent before knowing you need to repent and why. When you do not see or acknowledge a problem, you cannot fix the problem. Alternatively, you might just be one of the problems. Like so many fat and happy people with privilege and the expectation of privilege, it can be hard to see the forest for the trees in the mistreatment of the underprivileged.

Too many of us look the other way or don’t stand up for others who are not like us, let alone those that are different or perceived to be different than us. Too many educated and/or middle-class blacks don’t stand up for the greater number of their black brothers and sisters who do not have the privileges they have. Too many whites talk the talk of wanting social justice but don’t walk the walk of taking actions for justice in many forms, starting with who they support politically on local, state, and federal levels.

In my opinion, when it comes to race, there are generally three categories of people:

1. Outright Racists - These include white supremacists, those that speak in underlying racist tones, and/or use racist statements that became more evident with the election of President #45. Given his level of responsibility, by not denouncing injustices or the messages of protestors, he is “aiding and abetting” and, therefore, just as guilty of racism as George Floyd’s murderer.
2. Closet Racists - This group includes those that don’t profess to be racists. They may even talk the talk of being anti-racists but do not walk the walk of standing up for

those who need help. Silence and inaction are perhaps the most pronounced forms of being a closet racist.

3. Those that Stand Up for Equality and Social Justice - I am thankful that I am a very small part of the RCHP church that stands up for social justice. I always understood the need to do just that from my mom's influence and as implied in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Early Influence*. In the 60's, we saw higher percentages of people stand up when MLK was the leading voice in racial injustice in general and on TV that consisted of three evening news broadcasts on three stations. We now have a world where we have many choices in media, so many that ignore or twist the truth or practice *Trust Requires Context*, or ask "*What Would Jesus Do?*"

We must remember and regularly acknowledge that people of color still have less job opportunities, wage equality, quality housing, education, healthcare, criminal justice and more.

There have been waves of positives because of George Floyd's death. He certainly wasn't the first black man murdered by police or racists and surely will not be the last. Many of us saw the video of George's six-year-old daughter exclaiming "My daddy changed the world!" and that is true. His death happened in a world with videotape that both shows clear, murderous intent and can be viewed by most of the millions in America and billions worldwide. His death comes at a time when the still far too silent majority are slow to emerge from closet racism.

In the recent protests of such a great diversity of mostly young people, I see more and more people standing up. I see the potential for great God-given change for what is Right and Righteous reasons and acting on *Loving All Brothers and Sisters*. As a society, let us heal from the years, decades, and centuries of racial inequity through societal acknowledgement, repentance and as much redemption possible.

June 7, 2020, and March 5, 2023

We are Accountable for our Actions and Words

A sermon at Central Church in Ewing, NJ in October 2017 was about reading the Bible and seeing the Lord's word as the only truth to then be guided accordingly. The pastor quoted a survey of Christians who regularly attend church and that less than 15% read the Bible every day and more than 50% of Christians read the Bible only once a month, with these passages quoted:

John 18:19-20 - Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.

John 17:17 - Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Psalms 1:2 - But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

What is Truth should be measured in what is biblical and Godly. We must meditate and think deeply on the His Word and be cautious in our interpretation to avoid being self-serving. While

the Lord grants us free will, He also expects us to choose Right and Righteous paths and pursuits.

When we chose to be His disciple, whether a pastor, layman or even a public servant, we must act as Jesus would, namely selflessly. Our words and actions matter in living a Godly life.

September 17 and December 25, 2017

Be Courageous...Trust in The Lord

Today, I attended a service at Ramoth Nazarene Church in Vineland, NJ. Pastor Bill's service was centered in the book of Joshua, and how we must be courageous to trust fully in the Lord. Moses passed the ball of leadership of the Israelites for their settlement in the promised land to finish the long 40-year journey. In Joshua 1, the Lord God tells Joshua four separate times to be strong and courageous to finish the journey, concluding with Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

This verse resonates for me. First, it supports being *Not God Fearing* or afraid, for the Lord is with you wherever you go. That said, there is a caveat, as Moses had showed a bit of doubt or trust in the Lord (Numbers 20:9-12) and that led the Lord to pass that ball of leadership to Joshua. We must be all in, i.e., 100% in trusting our Lord. That takes perseverance, will, courageousness and strength.

Several years back I stated in *Blessed Mirrors*, "Over time, when we gain trust in the Lord sometimes with the help of others, we can heal and learn to look at a literal mirror in a different light." That light includes being at peace because you know that the Lord has your back and that we should have nothing to fear.

When you submit to the Lord fully, that means you walk the walk of what the Lord expects of us in a myriad of ways. That means you *Love All Brothers and Sisters*. That means you act Right and Righteous as much as humanly possible. That means you serve and do for others in need as much as possible as Jesus did when He walked with his disciples.

July 2, 2023

Racing Against the Unknown Clock

Often, we need reminders including clarity on a topic. I had started writing this but had hit a temporary wall many months before attending a Saturday eve service at Calvary Chapel in Old Bridge and heard guest Pastor Dr. Wayne House on April 23, 2023, and his sermon on the topic "Fight the Fight, Run the Race."

Excerpts from that sermon include from 2 Timothy 4:6-8 on Paul's perspective:

- I have fought the good fight.

- I have finished my course (race).
- I have kept the faith.

Other highlights of the sermon included:

- Since Paul wrote to Timothy at the end of his life, he asked and then answered, “Why Should it Matter Now?”
- Life will be over before you know it.
- You must plan for life and not wander aimlessly, wasting time and effort, and finding out only later in life that you have not exercised the right choices to win the race.
- Keep your eyes on Jesus at the finish line.

Additional scripture referenced in his sermon included:

- Philippians 2:16. Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Note that “have not run or labored in vain” suggests we should not waste the time granted by the Lord. There are so many ways to waste time and therefore the race has often been run in vain, including too much TV or social media when we could be doing for others. It also supports the Pastor’s conclusion related to being a planner.

- Hebrews 12:1. Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set out before us.

Two things jump out at me from this passage. First, we must “run with endurance,” with endurance needed for perseverance during challenging times and in worthy pursuits. Secondly, “...the race that is set out before us” as we are *On God’s Time*. As hard as it is to understand, God provides all our paths. That doesn’t mean we do not deviate from many paths along the way, taking the wrong paths based on our weaknesses and so many ungodly temptations.

Some 15 years ago I wrote *Top Ten Time Management Principles in Business*, with #1 being: “Be honest, direct, open and transparent in communication, both written and oral, as time is wasted in interaction otherwise,” which applies in all interactions. As I have (continued to) age and gained trinkets of His wisdom, I see time in additional light(s) including the following:

- We are all entitled to fun, laughter, and joy, with much of that involving randomness over planning.
- While we all live with an unknown expiration date/time, we can for the most part control how we use our time.
- As written in *Four Actions to Spread our Faith*, we must be purposeful, expectant, prepared and authentic. Being purposeful and prepared are key components of great planning, with planning a necessity to wisely use our God given time.
- At very different points in our life, we become old enough that we must slow down or retire from work and/or works. We have all heard the stories of those that retire and

stop using their mental and physical abilities to soon become infirmed or seemingly old overnight. We can't race anymore and can eventually struggle just to "walk" physically, emotionally, and mentally.

- I first gave a young man named Christian an analogy about productive time. Based on my age, physical and mental condition, let alone the desire for productivity in Him, I estimated that I have seven highly productive years left. Christian was 32 at the time we had the conversation, and full of hope that we would retire by 55. I instead suggested 60, which meant he would have 28 productive years ahead of him...400% more than me!

No matter our unknown time, we are on God's time, and we must use it wisely to be there for family, fellowship, loved ones and in doing for others.

June 1-8, 2023

Healing and Communication Compilation

Find Truths to Get to Healing

All too often, we see ourselves from a skewed or wishful perspective versus a real perspective let alone reality. Much of our skewed reality comes from past relationships that can make our heart and soul ache over extended periods of time. We need the Lord to heal, but usually need others to help heal as well. For many that could mean psychiatric or other types of counseling including Christian counseling.

As mentioned in the *Pursuit of Healing*, we must accept and define the personal issues that haunt us. Thereafter, a plan must be established to heal with the help of the Lord and others, and paths need to be found to trust the heart of others to help by in-depth communication.

Memories are often skewed about people, places, and events. For many of us, imperfect, flawed or outright mistruths or misconceptions become ingrained memories perceived as factual. On that basis, we see things very differently than a loved one or friend does. Hence, we must accept different points of view even on the same topic, even more so when many years or decades have passed. Our perceptions of truth or facts from the past should not get in the way of the here and now or tomorrows that follow.

Healing takes time and clearly is a process. It begins with taking a hard look at ourselves to move from denial to recognition, to forgiveness and then to repentance to ourselves, those in our lives and in the Lord. Moving through that process can lead to healing from abuse, failed relationships, persistent inequities and otherwise.

We should regularly ask and pray to the Lord about very specific concerns and issues in our lives and be as objective as possible when we are walking the walk in Him...and in our healing process and plan. Being truthful and honest with ourselves first and foremost isn't easy. We must be proactive in getting support from a friend, counselor, clergy member or disciple.

We can fool or lie to ourselves by not openly and honestly communicating with others. That may result in a superficial comfort level rather than true healing. It is like sweeping the dirt under the rug. The dirt will still be there even under the plushiest of rugs.

May 27, 2018, January 1 and June 15, 2019, May 2020, and March 5, 2023

The Pursuit of Healing

There are *Expectations of the Lord in Communication* needed in our day-to-day interactions and to heal from past hurts and sustain that healed status. Reminders to stay His course in healing are always worthy. That is why Alcoholics Anonymous has regular meetings.

Healing can be hard to maintain as it is so much easier to go back to past tendencies, shut down again and not make a worthy effort in communication and/or healing pursuits. Sometimes we never heal or fully heal from events in our childhood, from relationships with our parents, siblings, or spouses.

For too many, healing is needed to overcome involve some kind of abuse, like the ongoing verbal and therefore potential emotional abuse from my father. Sometimes that healing never happens like for my father from his past and my grandfather as an example to follow.

I never really knew my grandfather as he passed away when I was six years old, and I only saw him a few times in my very young life. I have no memories of him. He was a self-made man and extremely successful if measured by the material aspects of life. He did it the hard way, growing up in the tenements (now referred to as slums and ghettos) that existed for Irish Americans in Boston and other cities on the heels of the Irish Potato Famine. Although his family was extremely poor, he put himself through college and got his master's degree in chemistry. He partnered with another man, and they eventually owned multiple chemical manufacturing plants with some very well-known clients like Sunoco and the contract for the chemicals that preserved the Statue of Liberty. My father was usually away in private schools and grew up spoiled and distant from his father.

In many cultures, there is a tradition to follow in your father's professional or business footsteps, which was my grandfather's lifelong expectation for my father. My father wanted to be a doctor and not follow in my grandfather's footsteps as a chemist. After two years in Harvard taking required courses, my father told his father he was going to focus on courses to become a doctor. My grandfather responded, "I warned you. You'll see what happens." My grandfather had political connections that my father and mother believed included Joseph Kennedy (likely connected to bootlegging for both) and had used those influences to keep my father out of the draft during WWII. After he advised he was going back to college for his junior year and not going to be a chemist, his draft notice was delivered personally within a couple of days. He served as an exercise instructor at boot camp and other duties in Japan at the end of the war.

When my grandfather passed, my stepmother got \$20 million, my aunt got \$100,000 and my father got a single buck in 1960 dollars. The father I was just getting to know was already badly damaged by then, since he had never healed from events in his childhood or as a young adult. That reading of the will was the nail in the coffin that never allowed him to heal and therefore be the kind and caring person that I saw so infrequently but my mother knew from time together mostly before I was born. Hence, I grew up with a father who was very flawed, an alcoholic that was verbally abusive. As an adult, I tried more than a few times to see if he had changed or had the potential to do so with some help, but to no avail.

There are many families that have a family member that cannot heal and can drag others in the gutter with them. Too many sons and daughters faced conflicts between their parents that divorced or stayed together in badly broken marriages. There are many men and women damaged from past spousal relationships that impairs their ability to communicate to build trust and heal to then be able to have a truly healthy relationship. Most of us have things that need healing. As the rooted Christian that I have become, I know even more that being open in communicating is biblical and worthy. With hopeful open communication at the core, I want to be there for those I love, but also friends or strangers to serve and that means being part of healing processes.

Healing can only start after recognition and acceptance of past abuses or problems, let alone current issues. We can then build paths to be better in the pursuit of healing. When we are unable to heal, we can't be as happy as God intends or as fulfilled in our lives.

Healing must be pursued, something I first came to recognize by the age of 13 after I studied many college textbooks on behavior to understand the *Alcoholism in the Family*. I learned then to look at issues with loved ones (and eventually others) from three perspectives as devoid of emotions as possible, namely i) the other persons perspective and why, ii) your perspective and why, and iii) the potential for common ground as a third-party analyst would see it. It was many years later that I added the fourth perspective - what is *Right and Righteous*.

While many have been hurt deeply, there are many more that have magnified their hurts in a "woe is me" state of mind. All need healing, but we can rarely heal by ourselves. It takes open communication with others because introspection (and sometimes prayer) only goes so far. We need help from friends to counselors to His disciples. Yes, past relationships issues often result in a lack of trust and that leads to being hampered in an ability to communication to heal. Gaining understanding takes time and effort to earn trust, and then be positioned to heal.

As written in *Expectation of the Lord in Communication*, the Lord tells us that we are entitled to communication in many forms. From Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Seasoned with salt has a literal meaning for making things spicy, but salt was so important to preserve meats in the time Jesus walked the planet as it was considered currency. Salty conversation is the goal in this Scripture and that means being peppered with openness in general and in healing. We must be salty (as in open expression) yet gracious (kind, compassionate and tenderhearted) in our speech and actions with others in the pursuit of healing.

The world is broken, but it has always been more broken than collectively healed. We live in a seemingly increasingly shallow, superficial, greedy, and egotistical world and country that has collectively moved away from the Lord and His expectations in us. Plus, concerns of a broken world create individual anxiety and added needs for a different healing as well.

Nonetheless, we must accept that a *Better or Worse Approach to Living and Loving* means communicating openly to build trust in the Lord and to be able to do God's work including being His disciple in healing. We must allow His love in us to overflow, refill and overflow again and again as part of our pursuit of healing in ourselves and for those around us.

January 6, 2018, January 1st and June 30, 2019, May 15, 2020, and March 29, 2021

The Communication Collection

Preface

I have written about communication off and on for well over 25 years, a span that includes time when I wasn't yet born again (2003). My bible study hasn't changed my prior expectations in communication, just reaffirmed those expectations with better understanding. Plus, I have added

some level of tolerance for the lack of communication, even as not nearly patient enough in that regard. When initially drafting *Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"*), I included too much on the topic. Unlike those to follow, six chapters didn't make the cut, The Value of the Written Word, A Random and Scheduled Life, Yes or No and Why, Lack of Communication Leads to Assumptions, Erosion of Communication in the New Millennium and Snippets.

May My Words Be His Words

While driving though Worthington, OH on Monday November 13, 2017, I pulled up behind an older van with far more hand painted scripture and symbols than I have ever seen in one place. They pulled away and someone cut in front of me before I could read many, but I wrote down these two passages:

John 17:7 - Now they know everything comes from you.

John 7:17 - Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

I have been meaning to write *May my Words be His Words* for some time. I rarely hesitate when I write or speak but have found myself doing just that when not feeling sufficiently humble on topics like this one. I try to "couch" many things I write or speak with a reminder that I am expressing myself humbly or that what write is my interpretation, but still feel the need to do so more often. Inspired by these passages, I finished this prose started a year or so before.

May His Words Be My Words (Prose)

Live every day in His Words
His words are the only truth.

Be rooted to the Bible and His Teachings
Ask, "What Would Jesus Do?"

Question yourself and others with love.
Do so with worthy motives and selflessly.

Think deeply about what is right and righteous.
Before writing, speaking or acting.

This is a very basic prose that offers reminders of so much else written in the book. I am nothing more than a layman, not a schooled pastor, yet perhaps schooled in living, learning, and understanding in Him and many layers of what is right or righteous in *Studying the Word*. I pray that as many of my words are His words as often as possible.

October 22nd inspired partially by a sermon November 15-17, 2017.

Expectation of the Lord in Communication

The following is taken from the summary of a recent book *The Impact of Technology on Behavior and Happiness* by author Ocean Palmer: “Attention spans are decreasing at an alarming rate. Patience is down. Communication skills, written and interpersonal, are eroding. Manners are lost in self-absorption. Tempers are short, rudeness runs high, and cell phone dependency approaches neurosis. Frustration is relentless, with angry reactions just keystrokes away. On-line engagement times are rising, as are cyber-crime and bullying.”

There are many more similar studies and articles, including a recent MIT study that concluded that happiness in our society has fallen back to the levels of 1946 when so many had to rebuild their lives after a devastating World War. Nonetheless, I must ask, are there more inhumane acts and brutality against people or factions of societies committed now or are we just seeing it all day long on our smart phones or live on TV? Maybe. Do things therefore seem worse than they were 10-20 years ago? Likely. That said, plenty is going in the wrong direction from a biblical standpoint including interpersonal communication in leading to *End of Centuries* as I call it.

I also do not think the Lord intended communication to be limited to 140 characters or the much less for most for the majority in today’s fractured communications. Generation Z, also known as the I Generation, has only lived in a time of so-called smart phones and social media that lead to disconnected communication and social skills, let alone diminished collective happiness.

I have been concerned and therefore written on communication for many years as have seen it worsening over the years and decades, even as I became centered in the Lord and surround myself with more like-minded Christians. Is the erosion of communication biblical and, if so, in what sense? When you look at the negative aspects of waning communication in today’s fast paced world balanced against the positives of technology/cell phones, including information, conveniences and other aspects of a life managed on a smart phone, the negatives far exceed the positives for me in that eroded ability to communicate and the burgeoning lack of social skills. With social media, being bombarded with online marketing and so many distractions in life, being emotional or literally available is more of a challenge for most.

Even during simple communication at work or in person, most people ignore Proverbs 15:23, “A person finds joy in giving an apt reply - and how good is a timely word!” This scripture is clear and resonates for me, but even in church settings, emails that are ergonomic for me on a computer versus phone are mostly without a response. As per Merriam-Webster, “apt” means suitable, fitting, appropriate, befitting, relevant, germane, and applicable. When you roll all of that together, it means responding to what is said by another’s questions or comments, not being incomplete, woefully incomplete, responding to a different topic (something I call “deflection”) or not at all. “Timely” is relative because with busy lives that may not mean shortly after getting a call, text, or email but in a couple days. It should mean much more frequent responses like, “I am busy but will get back to you in a few days” as reasonable and likely biblical courtesy in communication.

There are so many scriptures related to how we should and should not communicate, including the following:

Proverbs 15:2 “The Tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.”

Proverbs 16:23 “The heart of the wise his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.”

Proverbs 13:17 “A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing.”

Proverbs 16:24 “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

Ephesians 4:15 “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

Psalms 19:14 “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Lord and my redeemer.”

Colossians 4:6 “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

The scriptures above are just a small sampling of communication expectations in the Bible. They cover a variety of topics interconnected to communication, like being seasoned in salt or the importance of grace and love connected to communication. Communication should also be *A Better or Worse Approach to Living and Loving* as in no harm no foul intended expressions when healing or mutual doing for others in the Lord are the intended purpose. After all, “a faithful envoy brings healing” and “let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord.”

October 26 and December 23, 2011, June 2019, and March 5, 2023

Trust in Transparency

I’ve used the words “transparent” or “transparency” regularly and seemingly for decades, both in my personal and business lives. I frequently get Googled and referred for senior housing by people who either want to develop or get into the senior housing or senior living business. Most are wide-eyed and unrealistic, and the majority are also lacking in transparency. This may be regarding a specific location, experience in combination with capital, why a market analysis followed by a financial analysis on a site/market is so critical and more. Instead of transparency, most have over confidence and “blind faith” if seemingly a faithful person. However, blind faith is supposed to be reserved for our Lord.

In business I’ve often told people, “Make believe I’m from Missouri, the Show Me state, and give me black and white documentation on a project. Show me, as in facts over opinions or

hyperbole.” For most, that request goes in one ear and out the other. “I can’t help in a vacuum,” I often think and have said in my less tolerant past.

Trust in transparency is important in all aspects of our lives, including all meaningful relationships. Being totally open to *A Better or Worse Approach to Living and Loving* with loved ones and those around us is best for a dramatically better opportunity for understanding. Understanding promotes health, well-being, healing, and love, and gets worthy business pursuits done as well.

The need for trust and transparency is also true for the church. RCHP prints a very detailed annual budget reviewed in an annual meeting or otherwise with a thorough description of all aspects of the church efforts and related budget items. Many churches, from traditional denominations to non-denominational mega churches, have limited transparency. Churches that are totally transparent can bring the skeptics back to church, and therefore to faith and God.

Unfortunately, in all aspects of our lives, many people no longer expect transparency. We must regain that expectation in all meaningful aspects of our lives. This includes family, friends, fellowship efforts, in our pastors and our government. Open communication with transparency rebuilds lost trust. When trust builds and is combined with faith, we can accomplish great and worthy deeds together.

April 4, 2015, May 2019, and January 17, 2020

Collaboration

Collaboration takes on many shapes and forms, from Mom and Dad working on a school project with their children to work efforts. Collaboration is the yoked partner of communication. Without great communication and collaboration between partners, a team, or a small group, let alone a large group, things don’t get done.

As a Christian, I believe – as I am sure most Christians do - that completing worthy missions is an obligation and expectation of the Lord. That takes collaboration. Collaboration takes understanding, including gaining insight on the motivating factors, wherewithal, and availability of team members, including their abilities as doers and communicators. Teams also need organized and talented leaders that seek solutions and resolutions as issues arise.

How we manage our communication is important. I feel strongly that managing tasks individually or within a group is best done concisely and in writing, preferably via emails as done by almost all businesses of substance so that tasks and therefore, collaboration can be coordinated by a team leader and team members to accomplish worthy goals.

May 3-25, 2015, and June 22, 2019

Older Communication Expressions

The first three topics below entitled Busy, Closure in Communication and Deflection were written in 2000-01, with COPAETAF written in 2004. For frame of reference, I become born again in 2003.

Busy

There must be a balance of managing your time no matter how busy it is to schedule plenty of time for family and meaningful relationships. This balance is lacking for most as somehow new technology-related changes have led to increased work weeks versus the opposite. While I have stretches over days and even weeks of being “busy imbalanced,” but I will not let my business goals overwhelm my family or personal goals.

Busy is also an excuse used by nearly everyone, including me at times. I am finding myself just saying “no” more though yet try to offer *Communication in Closure*, which is often the appropriate alternative to “being busy.”

Being too busy does not mean you cannot extend the brief courtesy with “I am focused on a few projects now; I’ll circle back in a few weeks” as an example. People often conveniently respond, “I am busy” versus a straight answer that they aren’t interested and why in a business arrangement or a meaningful relationship.

Did you ever notice that if asked, everyone says they are busy? Why? Not being busy is something that’s hard to admit, damaging many people’s ego in doing so. If you are busy, you feel important even as most busy bodies are just a nuisance. Being busy in one’s own mind contributes greatly to one’s self worth and self-esteem. I bet that if you ask 10 people if they are busy, only one will say he or she’s not. Clearly most of us can manage our time for someone or something we feel is important versus using busy as a crutch or an excuse.

Some might question if I truly am busy since I am taking time out of a busy schedule to write this. Consider it therapy for the overly busy and therefore not appropriately communicative world I live and work in, including so many using busy and other reasons for *Deflection*. Writing is my idea of relaxation at times, and a release for the too inconsiderate world we live in.

Is being truly busy a bad thing? I really don’t think so, but we each have our busy limits when it comes to personal health and well-being. Remember the connection to time, as in there is only so much of it, so maximize time and be busy for important things and yet never too busy to communicate openly and honestly, even if briefly. Just remember to balance important things in life that keep you busy, and do not use busy as an excuse.

Written Fall 2000 and February 2002

Closure in Communication

Why is it that we ignore the obvious and common courtesy of “closure?” Closure is not often provided in professional or personal relationships. There are varied reasons for lack of closure. For one, people are hesitant to express perceived and/or real expression of rejection of another person. Some are trying to be kind, but most are not capable of being open and honest about why a relationship including friendship or business cannot work for them. Most people have trouble saying “no” or “I won’t” or “I don’t want to”, or even, “I think you are wrong and why,” as a wrongful perceived negative.

I believe whatever thoughts or reasons as to why something can’t be done, why a meeting can’t take place or why you are not interested is a positive thing. Understanding through pointed communication allows me to attempt to make changes, adjustments or corrections with this person or others. I accept negative comments as constructive for the sake of learning and positive improvement, and therefore, closure is important to me in all interactions.

When I am told the reason(s) for something not working or why communication on a topic has ceased, I may gain understanding what I did wrong to make something work with someone else.

Written early 2001, edited 2006

Deflection

There are various types of “deflection,” occurring in all written and verbal settings, but focused on the workplace hereinafter. For purposes of this analogy, deflection is the ability to deflect or defer, put off, not complete and/or “shuck the responsibility” of an assignment, task, or request. Deflection is a learned behavior. For many, it may have started in early grammar school when the dog ate that first piece of homework. Like many learned behaviors, certain people get better at “deflecting,” and for them, as a “deflector,” they have created an “art of deflection.” As for the latter, you would likely not see it as such if you were the “deflectee,” the one who is the target of the deflector practicing deflection.

In the work scenario, deflection is the so-called ability to either not do work assigned, delay getting work done or to get others to do it. It is the opposite of a slogan coined in the 1990’s by Nike but one we should live by in so many ways, that being “Just Do It.” For those of you who have mastered the art of deflection, I am sure you can relate, but then again you may be in denial, another form of deflection. To better understand “Deflection” related to work, but in all aspects of life, it is necessary to look at some of the types of deflection.

Didn’t hear you or didn’t listen - Many former staff thought I didn’t listen but did so far more than they thought and yet knew I can improve. Often, there was just no need to respond to statements that do not address the topic or the work at hand, or the topic was already known. Failure to hear or not listening clearly remains the number one way to deflect from responsibilities, duties, or even basic requests.

Don't understand what you have been asked - Skilled deflectors use various forms of not understanding, like complimenting like as you are so smart that I need help to understand, or I don't want to make a mistake so need clarity before doing the work.

Provide an answer, just to a different question - The skilled deflector uses this form of deflection frequently. The deflector is trying to give the perception he/she is trying to address a question or request. Politicians are very skilled in this type of deflection.

Mixed topics - Mixing topics is where the respondent combines unrelated topics in a verbal or written response. Again, politicians are very skilled as such. Doing so is counterproductive to getting to a conclusion.

Failure to prioritize - In work, when assigned multiple tasks, skilled deflectors will frequently address the task(s) that are known to have lower priorities but requiring the least effort. They believe this will buy time for a more time-consuming higher priority request.

Busy - *Busy* is just that but is also one of the greatest traps or excuses, yet we should never be too busy for our boss during work hours. Plus, if well rewarded, doesn't some extra time here and there rectify that? Plus, in business or personal interactions, people struggle with "I am not interested" or "no" as "busy" becomes the excuse or deflection.

Delegation - Delegating to your own staff is a must, but delegating laterally or to a boss is another device for the skilled deflector. Good organizations function within a pyramid structure, and while you can place a square upside down, you can't place a pyramid upside down without it falling over.

Incomplete Work - This will require follow-up for a boss in work and buy time for a complete response for the deflector. Doing part of an assignment is usually little help. In school, teachers give "Incomplete" grades. In work, we should do the same!

Incomplete Response - This is more and more common, such as asking two questions and getting a response to just one. Often, the deflector does not respond to a request to schedule a call or meeting when answering a small portion of a memo or email.

I Forgot - Why do some never forget, and others do all the time? It could be an organized mind versus a disorganized one, and sometime shows what/who is important to you, including doing the least you can and becoming skilled at the art of deflection.

Conclusion

Deflectors need to assess the why's of their deflections. Deflectors can take charge of their own lives with open and honest communication in all forms. We must learn and relearn to separate real from perceived excuses as to why things can't get done or aren't getting done. Of course, remember the opposite of deflection and "Just Do It," but more importantly, "Just do it well."

August 2000 and edited March 29, 2021

COPAETAF

This may be a strange acronym; at least in spelling or pronunciation, but not in the purpose as a recipe for a lasting, meaningful, and happy relationship between two people in love, even as most of these things apply in other relationships.

Co is for communication first and foremost, something everyone knows is important, but few truly work at and maintain. **Co** is also for commitment to each other, to making it work in COPAETAF itself and everything related to its principles. **Co** is for compromise because you can't each have everything your way. There must be our way, my way and your way, and a willingness to compromise. **Co** is for confidence in each other, let alone yourself. **Co** is also for consistency in being there for your loved one, in demonstrating your love for better or for worse, and in each of the principles of COPAETAF to achieve your mutual goals of lasting love and togetherness.

Pa is for a positive attitude, about your relationship and life in general. You can't help but to be happier if you have a positive attitude, and your significant other will be happier too. In true love, you can be the basis for positiveness in your mate. Apart from that, you may struggle to be positive, but together you will feel satisfied and content. **Pa** is also for patience, because we need to be patient and understanding of each other's needs and desires.

E is for effort because all important things require effort, and being in a loving, trusting, happy relationship is on the first tier of what is important in life. Showing effort to your mate in varied and consistent ways, and in the day-to-day little things will allow your love to grow.

T is for trust, with many things requiring trust, so critical to being able to let you be totally open and communicating with one another. You can express anything to your mate because of love, so trust your mate with what's on your mind. Trust in each other, and respect each other, which goes hand in hand with confidence that your mate will take your feelings into account in day-to-day decisions. Understanding must go hand in hand with trust.

A is for affection in a coupling, which can take many forms, like an embrace, a kiss, the touch, any of which may make you feel everything is wonderful at the end of a not so wonderful day. Passion and love emanate from affection. **A** is also for availability, emotionally and literally.

F is for fun, and while laughing is good medicine, there are many things that can make us happy or give us enjoyment without a belly laugh. **F** is also for fortitude, the need for perseverance. **F** is also for faith in the Lord, faith in a purpose in life for you and your mate, faith in each other and faith that all the components in COPAETAF will result in a loving and happy relationship that we all deserve.

Fall 2004

Postscript: If this was written even a few years later, my evolving path first attitude would have resulting in acronym beginning with **F** for Faith.

Personal Stories & Reflections

Acting Godly or Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?"

What is an alcoholic? What is abusive or addictive behavior? I struggled with the answers when I was young. My mother and father were heavy drinkers for most of my childhood, with differing personalities as a result. When I was eleven, I purchased my first book on alcoholism. For the first time, I read about AA's Twelve Steps of Recovery, or just Twelve Steps and other philosophies relating to abuse and recovery. By the time I turned 13, I had read a dozen more books on related topics including abusive behavior.

I strove to understand how these things could be applied to my father and, to a lesser degree, to my mother. Mom always loved me and expressed that love. When Mom drank, she didn't love me, or express that more or less. She wasn't much different when she drank too much either; just more open to the point of extremes and more likely to lash out in anger to my father but not often me. When my father drank, he went from sometimes nice to mean spirited or just mean. He wasn't physically abusive, but his sharp tongue became a razor-sharp sword of verbal abuse when he drank. He didn't act or express love easily or much at all either way.

Hence, my reading was mostly aimed at understanding my father. I came away with some positive conclusions. First, I realized it wasn't me, I wasn't the problem. Secondly, I realized both his alcoholism and behavior in general were deeply rooted in his issues with the grandfather I never knew discussed in *The Pursuit of Healing*. Lastly, I learned how to separate myself from my own emotions to be able to think logically and to a degree clinically.

Mom seemed like an invincible rock, at least until that Labor Day eve when I was 12 and she blitzed through a telephone pole at 50 miles an hour while blitzed. She barely survived after many hundreds of stitches and many surgeries later, all while I was in seventh grade. My father lessened drinking as he had to be there for her, and he was for our move to a peaceful rural location for my 8th grade year. Mom recovered and he was our sole support for the first time in five years. Before High School, we moved to High Bridge and drinking worsened again for both.

For some, becoming an alcoholic is due to a "triggering event" in someone's life. This was true for my father. I believed my mother when she told me that my father was the predominately good person that she saw in him before I was born, or at least before I can remember. I believe and have for so long that the change in my father was set in motion by one event in his life as mentioned in *Pursuit of Healing*. That didn't mean he wasn't an alcoholic before that, but more so that his drinking increased in frequency and volume.

My father always liked to entertain, and that was made easier in late 50's and early 60's with great jobs at Pepsi-Cola, rising to the position as Eastern Sales Manager. At that time, that involved meeting and entertaining with celebrities that advertised for Pepsi with a very nice expense account. For my father, he had many favorite haunts, but none more than Toots Shor's where his Pepsi-Cola expense account bought regular, frequent rounds for cronies including Howard Cosell, Gordon McRae and others.

I remember going there during a weekend that included the Easter parade, dressed like Mom's doll. I was eight I believe, going into that world famous bar saying I was Tom Cassidy's son. Jack Lescoulie, the former Today Show sports anchor host, made time for the kid whose father bought those many rounds. He said there were no sports stars there to introduce me to but took me over to introduce me to a game show host, the relatively new sidekick to "Here's Johnny," Mr. Ed McMahon.

When I was just turning nine, my father got fired from Pepsi for "liberties" with his expense account and other unknown issues. Concurrently, his drinking led to his very successful janitorial business, including several Catholic Dioceses as clients going belly up. We went from a family that owned four homes, living in what was called a very nice and now an upscale town (Mendham, NJ) to moving to a rented home on the edge of a small town. We went from my father being the breadwinner of the family to Mom in that role at *Lee Bradley's*, the antique shop/art gallery/restaurant and home combined. When we lived there, he worked making sour cream at a dairy on the overnight shift, various bar tending jobs, and then eventually he went back into sales and did better when her accident forced him to step up.

Mom never forgave him for his many dalliances or losing the eight-acre Mendham property with three homes, a stream and pool made from damming up a branch of the stream. She reminded him constantly and more so when fueled by the liquor. Fights resulted, and she regularly threw things at him, like full glasses of Fleishman's over ice. He responded with verbal taunts, all of which I sought to avoid. In Mendham, I had the woods to find peace, or my best friend who lived one house down. At Lee Bradley's where we lived thereafter, I hid in the attic, or if fighting was on the second floor, in the basement.

It was in that attic that I began reading about alcoholism and abuse with flashlight in hand. I vowed then that I would avoid fights and yelling with my wife in front of my kids. I almost always held true to that, typically ending arguments quickly or fleeing when my spouse was loud or over emotional. Collectively, my three kids have not heard as much parental negativity in arguments in their lifetime as I did one winter in Long Valley. That is not to say that they shouldn't have heard less sarcastic comments and more.

These battles between Mom and Dad continued for years, and for years, I suggested to Mom they should get divorced, starting when I was about eight. Instead, she held on to more pleasant thoughts of the past and drowned her sorrows more in that bottle. When I was 13 and we were then living in High Bridge, with Dad traveling and philandering again, things worsened, until that day she lost it, wielded that large knife, and tore all his custom-tailored suits Pepsi had paid for in that bloated expense account and destroyed much of his writings including a book.

They divorced shortly thereafter, but her drinking continued to grow. She never really worked through my High Bridge High School years, bringing in money for food, gas, her Benson and Hedges, whiskey, and the phone bill by cooking for room and boarders at the house, sometimes selling a few antiques to dealers. Yes, as she reminded me, she fell walking up the hill behind the house to get the cat I let out, and her knee was never the same. That was not a handicap past a year or so as the real handicap was the whiskey.

I built on the *Lee Bradley's Years* and continued to learn about hard work, beginning full time work at the first convenience store in the County in my freshman year of high school. I supported Mom and was also the facilitator, allowing her to drink and drown her sorrows through the mortgage, taxes, insurance, and utility payments that I started paying the month before I turned 15 and lasted until the house was sold just before my 19th birthday.

A year after her divorce, when I had just turned sixteen, I had a private meeting with her former divorce lawyer, the esteemed (to me and others) Judge Herrigal, who I got to know the summer before High School as I worked to help remodel his large farmhouse. He saw the slippage due to pain and more so alcoholic influences in Mom and how all over the place she had become. After we spoke, Mom agreed to place a mortgage on the house for all I put in that would have an accruing principal balance. A little over a year out of high school when the house was sold and I got my money back, about \$11,000, a fair amount then. That was the money I put into the stock, equipment, remodeling, and advertising in my Deli/convenience store I opened just before I turned 19. Mom bought the building with the proceeds of the sale of the house, and I again paid the overhead, as the loving son and facilitator.

I worked hard, but I played hard too, something I learned from Mom. At Tim's Deli (yes, lacking in modesty then), I wanted out for the evening after opening at 7AM and seeing the store through the dinner rush for subs and prepared foods, so I left the store to employees until the 10PM closing. Unfortunately, that meant Mom was in the store too as she lived above the store in a two BR apartment with a den while I had the studio apartment in the rear. She was not supposed to be in the store at all, but how could employees keep her out? By the time I left the store in the evening, she was usually plastered, and she was not a fair or impartial drunk. The results were sandwiches for somebody she liked with a close to pound of meat or 1-2 slices if you didn't pleasantly respond to her inquisitive or by now sarcastic banter. Sometimes, she just charged different prices on an item depending on if you smiled at her or not.

There was no talking to her, and the judge and others tried to intercede to no avail. I didn't have that second mortgage for my protection like I did in High School. One day I had enough and left for the shore, leaving the business to her. She ran it down from such a great start, but still sold it for a handsome profit. I never saw my investment back, not one dime. She rented a large, lovely cottage on an estate, lived, and drank well until the money ran out two years later.

I didn't visit her that often for two years after I left. She hit bottom and was broke by the time I was 22, married and living in a large Victorian by the shore. My wife Nadine was understanding and supportive, and she moved in with us there. For many months we played "Hide the Bottle" from Mom and within six months to a year, she had quit completely. She began working and became totally self-sufficient. She never looked back; only drinking a glass of wine during a holiday or one Old Fashion when eating out with us in a nice place versus so pizza with her and my kids.

Starting when I was 13, during the eighteen months my father and I remodeled the house in High Bridge, he introduced me to drinking by sharing Rolling Rocks while we worked. At 14, I mentioned I didn't like beer as much as I did wine, so he started buying me Gallo wine by the gallon, and I drank it mixed with lemonade while he drank the Rolling Rocks as we worked, with

his Whiskey and/or Martinis in the evening. I used to bring a half-gallon jug of my homemade Sangria in a glass orange juice container over to the school ground when I played basketball in the summer for a couple of mid-teen years. When he left, Mom only occasionally got it for me so for a while I made my own wine using Welch's frozen grape juice as a base. It was ghastly but tolerable when it was mixed with lemonade.

So how did these experiences of my immediate family of alcoholics influence me? We tend to become what we grow up with or revolt against it, and in some cases, we bounce back and forth. In my last couple years of high school, I drank lots of Boone's Farm, beer, shots of tequila and smoked pot. The summer I turned eighteen, the drinking law changed from 21 to eighteen, fortunate or more likely unfortunate timing. My eighteenth year I worked six days a week, a 45–48-hour week, six to seven hours a day until 11:30 PM on four evenings, and 7AM to 5PM on weekends. I commuted to college four days a week, an hour plus round trip, took 15 credits and played intramural basketball after turning down all those scholarships to be there for Mom.

Despite the schedule, I faithfully met my friends at the bar those evenings after work, drank beer and tequila, ate awesome grilled cheese sandwiches, and played pool and foosball until 2AM. On weekends, it was longer nights and various other places with live music. On Sunday, after work ended at 5, Mom made a nice Sunday dinner and then I was asleep by 6 or 7. I took the Holy Day off from drinking by coincidence only to start anew the next day, repeating the weekly cycle. By nineteen, I was worn out, as my stomach and related internal equipment decided that the combination of liquor and diet was too much, and I spent five days in the hospital. My system had revolted, and I wasn't digesting food well, but it was not an ulcer. I didn't have a drink for nearly eighteen months. When I did, it was wine or sea breezes and rarely in excess. I got drunk and very sick at 27 and only got truly intoxicated once in my life after that.

In her later years, Mom would not discuss her heavy drinking years or my fathers for that matter, let alone the impact on me. She often saw me tired, worn or stressed, and accused me of drinking too much as an adult, but I was just stressed and/or overworked.

I tried to see if my father had changed and/or became sober four times in my adult life, and if the man my mother fell in love with had returned in some form. After colon cancer surgery caught early for him when I was in my 30's, he quit drinking. Perhaps ironically, even when he became sober, he was that over the line sarcastic, negative drunken persona and never returned to the person Mom fell in love with that I never knew.

The professionals define an alcoholic as once one, always one. Maybe that is true on average, and professionals must treat people under that assumption and based on averages, like the Twelve Steps. In the late eighties I was a director on a non-profit board of a substance abuse facility. I had many conversations then and after with professionals that understood and/or counsel for alcohol or substance abuse. Most will admit that there is not one answer that works for all. Twelve steps work for many and likely most cannot control partial use of whatever substance. Some can. However, time, knowledge, and the wisdom gained from experience can tell you that to enjoy life to the fullest, it is best to be sober.

November 2002, March 2006, and July 21, 2019

Lee Bradley's and the Pieta

Preface

Lee Bradley's was my mom's combined antique shop, art gallery and restaurant (Lunch with a limited menu and dinner by appointment) in Long Valley NJ in an historical home. The Pieta was part of that entertaining time.

Lee Bradley's

It was a big change moving from Mendham to Long Valley. It was only 15 miles to the west, but seemingly worlds apart. I was just turning nine as I went from a backwoods explorer to living in a small old town. Dad went from the provider of the household to barely providing for himself, taking various bartending jobs. For a time, he worked at the Welsh Farms dairy in town, the only employer of any size, where he made sour cream on the overnight shift. Mom went from being a housewife to the primary support of our family, the proprietor of Lee Bradley's.

Mom rented a circa 1774 center hall stone colonial on a bit of a rise on a large property after you passed by after several row houses on the way out of town. It was a landmark; a place where George Washington slept a couple times during the Revolutionary war with three feet thick walls and tall windows. It was impressive, so kids in town looked at me as a spoiled kid in the big house, not the kid that lived in a rented house that served as a business and home, where I had to work and help. The home had four very large rooms on each floor with a wide center hall, with a large eat in kitchen, formal dining room with fireplace and two large parlors on the first floor.

The two parlor rooms on the one side of the hall had four tables in each room made from old wrought iron Singer sewing machine bottoms, seating four each. Mom served lunch, there, but only one to two choices for homemade soup and a couple types of sandwiches made only on freshly delivered French bread from a local bakery. The dining room was utilized for dinner and lunch parties, but by appointment only.

The tables in the parlors were surrounded with antiques and artwork, which also layered the deep windows and were in the nooks of the dining room, and the upstairs and downstairs halls. Many of the antiques came from regular visits to a weekly auction on Schooley's Mountain that wasn't far away. I looked forward to those trips to the auction, as I was buying stuff there too and selling things on consignment in Mom's shop. Most everything was Early American, which of course suited this house very well. I didn't retain much of the items bought and traded, just a couple of bottles and limited-edition lithographs from the late 1800's. I do wish I never parted with that French musket from the 1660's I bought at the auction.

The walls were filled with paintings, some of Mom's students, and others on consignment, including mine. I painted watercolor abstracts, usually sold in pairs, small at \$35 per pair. Mom specialized in paintings of mostly fruits, vegetables, and flowers, many painted on sections of the floorboards from the attic. By the time we left that house, the attic was a patchwork of plywood.

The Pieta

In early 1967, Mom had a gentleman stop in that had a painting that had been in his attic for some time and in his family over many centuries, the Pieta of Jesus on the Cross. He thought that it was done by Michelangelo. It was about three to four foot high in a large gold gilded frame that later appraised for many thousands on its own. After much negotiation, this gentleman agreed to let the painting be shown in the gallery for six weeks that summer, provided Mom conducted research on its background, confirm the identity of the painter so he could sell the painting thereafter. If not a Michelangelo, it was hoped that it was completed by another well-known painter of that time as many of that period did their own version of the Pieta.

My mom's nephew (and my cousin) was Penrod Scofield, a mural painter and illustrator who lived in Manhattan. He and his partner had friends at the Metropolitan Museum, including one patriarch of the museum, the horror film actor, Vincent Price. Think Thriller and MJ for the younger than me generation(s). He and a few others associated with the Met at the time visited the house one evening for dinner and I was the waiter. The evening they visited included many laughs, with Mom serving a great dinner of Hungarian Goulash (The queen's recipe) and other specialties. Mr. Price, with that sardonic smile, was seemingly so much like one of his mysterious characters and reminded me of his character in the Raven.

After arrangements were made for security guards, the painting was delivered to the Met and their experts confirmed a respected artist painted it in the 1500's, but unfortunately it was not Michelangelo or any of the top five to ten painters at the time. It was concluded that it was valuable enough that armed guards had to stay in the house while it was displayed over the next six weeks. The cost of the guards was to be paid from the proceeds of a \$5 admission charge, with the balance of the admission charges to go the restoration of paintings from the Florentine floods. There were many printed stories on the showing starting with a Morristown article than then got picked up in the Newark Star Ledge and in NYC, and then word of mouth spread from one art lover to another and more so one Christian visitor to the next.

Within two weeks, there were lines out the back door weaving into the back yard, with the painting shown in the front entry hall. People came straight up the hall for the viewing got a view to the left of the impressive dining room with a sign there stating, "Dinner by Appointment" and then were steered through the two parlors when they left in the hopes that they would buy an antique or painting from the shop as they exited.

The viewing was clearly a religious experience, with so many women clutching rosaries from the moment they got in line until pulling out of the driveway. One night, after hearing a noise, I came downstairs in the middle of the night and walked into the painting, or rather the heavy, pointed corner of the large protruding frame. I badly bruised a couple ribs, with uncomfortable breathing for some time thereafter. Nonetheless, it was summer, and I had full time work to do. Rain or shine, the lines kept increasing, with so many standing in the hot summer sun, and I responded, selling cups of lemonade and iced tea while I pitched things to buy in the shop, including my paintings. Within a week, I had to paint 3-4 a night to keep up with the demand.

When the viewing ended, the lines were at their peak. It seemed that the viewing could have continued forever. The demand of the public to be connected to Jesus who died on the cross for us was so evident in this historical masterpiece. Without parental prompting, I just didn't see it as a 13-year-old that summer.

Post Pieta and Other Times at Lee Bradley's

Lee Bradley's success was enhanced by the Pieta viewing and more private dinner parties were one of the results. The dining room was impressive with a deep hearth and hand-hewn trim off the large eat-in kitchen and sat 12-144. There were some well-known guests, including Perry Como a few times on the way to visit his daughter at Centenary College and the most well-known guest, Jackie O. Mom's memories of Jackie and mine differ. She recalled Jackie as difficult and miserly in negotiating the menu and prices for a couple of her dinner parties.

The waitress couldn't make it for her second dinner party, and I pinch hit. Mom spent an hour training me on the proper etiquette in between cooking. I was most proper and maybe even cute for a just soon to be 13-year-old. At the end of the night, Jackie tipped me a \$50 bill, so she certainly never seemed miserly to me. I recall my father over breakfast the next morning being so upset when I mentioned my trip, at least three full nights of his bar tips.

The momentum for the Pieta was short lived as on Labor Day weekend, Mom was out late somewhere near Morristown after a night of too much drinking. She drove off the highway over 50 MPH and sawed off a telephone pole, thrusting her through the windshield headfirst. Fortunately, she was driving her huge Pontiac Bonneville station wagon, or she would not have lived. As it was, she barely survived and for a couple days her life was in serious doubt. My father and I were contacted, and we went to the hospital on the evening before Labor Day, 1967. I did not leave that waiting room for a nip and tuck 24 hours of many surgeries for Mom, watching the Jerry Lewis Telethon almost all that time. From that night, I still have a fondness for the children of muscular dystrophy as a favorite charity and an understanding that we must always be thankful of what we have in fleeting lives.

Mom received a couple hundred stitches in her face and head, plus some broken bones. She never had eyebrows again, with stitches and then mascaras replacing them. She had glass imbedded everywhere, some that worked its way out over the years. She had her head shaved and stitches zigzagged across her head. She was in the hospital for many weeks, with Lee Bradley's closed during that time. She came home just before Halloween and the trooper that she was greeting the kids at the door in what the kids thought was the greatest makeup job they ever saw. Mom recovered from this accident, but Lee Bradley's did not.

Summer 2012 and July 21, 2019

Leona, Mom and Nana... Giving Everlasting

My mother or Mom to me was Nana or Nana Lee to her kids and grandchildren. She always said, “You have to be a giver, not a taker.” On a small, fixed income in her later years, she was a giver in many forms, including love, cards, mostly low-cost material gifts and homemade food. For some, including those she loved most, she even gave you a hard time.

When she found out she was terminal in late 2002 leading to her passing at the end of March 2003, she wanted more than anything to be sure that all her close friends and family, even new friends, received something special from her. She started the process of giving special gifts while still home, sensing it was her last Christmas. The cancer moved rapidly, and she woke up paralyzed just after New Year. For those that she didn’t get to see to give a gift, I received ongoing gift instructions when I visited her in the hospital and then hospice, and after she rallied and stabilized there, at the nursing home.

Many weeks after she passed, I met two of her newer friends to give them a ceramic monk holding a mug of beer and an end table of sorts. One sweet woman was the nurse’s aide she had from October until early January. Mom certainly entertained her caregivers with her stories and the aide said she was amazed at all the things that Mom had done when she was young, things women didn’t do, and she was right. Her other new friend was the visiting nurse for Mom during her last month at home. She said enjoyed her visits with Mom, even though there was very little she could do for her. She said Mom’s satisfaction with her life and therefore her comfort in passing was unique, and that she was openly loving. Mom cared for these caring ladies as they cared for her.

Mom’s material giving on took different forms. Over the last few months, she was alive but not home, I went through her belongings, finding little hidden and special notes just for me, as well as many with dead horse topic reminders. Plus, there were notes with all her possessions and gifts. There were so many gifts not yet given but noted as to who, plus things I knew I had to pass on like the sweater at the bottom of a drawer she knitted for Uncle George and never gave him, something Ron would appreciate the most. I found three beautiful afghans in a box with notes for each of my children to be given on their wedding day, all with loving notes from Nana. There were a couple more afghans found too, and one large one was given to Dave, my close friend who she adored and who also helped me with the final move of her furniture and the remaining odds and ends. Like Uncle George who raised her (with Aunt Clara), Dave had no faults in her eyes, and this gift from her was only fitting for one of her “other sons.”

Christmas was a holiday Nana lived year-round in her continual buying and storing of Christmas gifts to give to family and friends. Her full wall closet was more than half full of Christmas gifts not given. Under the full-sized bed were flat boxes with the smaller knick-knacks, from cups, mugs, ornaments, and ceramic figurines to whatever. She was on a fixed income, so they weren’t expensive. They were typical of most of the gifts we received for many years, yet somehow, she found the money for one special gift for each of her closest family.

In mid-February, after she rallied at the hospice and was very together mentally, I asked her about the many gifts of Christmas future yet to be given. I suggested that I box gifts for Ron, his children and my children for many Christmases to come, and she was so happy with this idea. After all, she bought them to give to our families.

We tried very much to celebrate her life as she did over the last year that she was with us. I enjoyed giving the gifts she had planned to give and more she didn't, knowing she would be pleased. She didn't want a funeral service. Instead, to fulfill her wishes, we had a party for her friends and family several weeks after she died in the apartment building that she lived in the last ten or so years of her life. I had written of her life in a much longer 25-page life story in her words from childhood to her parting and gave that with a gift from her to the forty or so that attended. At least a couple dozen more were mailed to friends far away.

Her influence on me will not diminish even as I grow older and in my faith. As my mother's son, I continue to throw out the bad as she said and keep the positive, one of the *Seven Positive Principles*. She had so many positives that became part of me, including her ability to give of herself. As the biggest fan of my writing, her inspirations were one of her lasting gifts, and the gift that by extension and growth may reach the most people. That said, perhaps the greatest gift from Mom and Nana is the ability to love others, but also love life itself. Loving and giving are both key *Core Beliefs and Principles* let alone communication, respect, truthfulness, and others that she instilled in me.

Her rules to live by included having fun, living life without regrets, taking chances, being there for friends and family, and yes, being demanding in expectations...all part of who I am as well. She was kind and caring to strangers of all walks of life unless they give you a reason otherwise. She taught others and me that *A Promise is a Promise* and something all too often forgotten in the new millennium, that giving is truly more important than receiving.

Over many generations, Nana reached many in positive ways. There is very much truth in the theory of six degrees of separation, or something like that. Who knows how many people or friends' known and unknown that she influenced. Her spirit and the essence of her giving nature will continue to be with me, now more than ever interwoven with my faith, as her later year's pet peeves or dead horses fade into a distant memory. I can and will continue to be positively influenced by the most influential human being in my life. I can and will share her positive influence with as many others that will listen as just way her giving is everlasting.

I am also *Comfortable Being Uncomfortable* and open in communication as traits ingrained in my DNA from Mom. She installed so much in me including *Loving All Brothers and Sisters* as suggested in *Martin Luther King, Jr., His Early Influence*.

When she was a couple weeks away from passing, she was in great pain, and surely not an easy patient to care for at the nursing facility. As a result, the aide on duty for her that evening moved the nursing call button out of her reach. The phone was in reach, so she got to an outside line and called 911. The local First Aid Squad showed up, went to her room and then the nursing station to admonish the staff on duty. Just Mom being Mom holding others accountable.

She died the early morning of March 31, 2003. The night before I visited as I did every evening, including that last couple weeks when she lay unconscious and seemingly unaware. I spoke to her off and on for a couple hours, including breaks to gather myself from my grief and tears. I wasn't sure she heard me, but just in case, I wanted her to hear my hope in the legacy of her giving and that if would be giving everlasting. More than a few times, I promised her I had been through all her precious stuff, and that it was to be given to many just the way she instructed.

I wanted to end my visit by reading some prose to her, finishing with a mutual favorite we used to read together when I was in my teens by Rod McKuen, the poem Children One and All. The last of many verses are below:

Some of our people die in misery,
some of us die in peace.
Some of us die for nothing,
but dying doesn't cease.

And at night you can't tell fancy coffins
from boxes in the hall.
Then we're only children,
children one and all.

I couldn't fight the tears and barely got through reading the prose, just like now as I write this. When I finished, I looked up and saw the faintest of smiles I hadn't seen for many days. I went over to hug her for an extended time as my tears flowed. I whispered some things about how she will always be with us, and we will carry on her giving legacy and finishing with "I love you" before leaving. I know she heard me. In her installed hope, giving and loving, she is with me now and forever, as she is with my children and so many others.

May 7, 2003, July 5-21st, 2019, April 12, 2020, and March 30, 2021

My Father and Mabel Mercer

My father Tom loved music, and while I would like to think I have inherited little from him, the love of jazz is an exception. My father and mother shared a love of music, but he had the greater passion for music, and she had the much greater passion for art. He often swayed when listening and singing to artists and songs. He played Sinatra all the time on that Zenith turntable, and Ella and Nat King Cole regularly too. Both he and Mom knew lesser known to most Mabel Mercer and played her albums often. In 1984, this great lounge singer passed away. My father was living in Florida then and had started contacting me after a drought of many years, seemingly sober and happy, as evidenced by most of what he wrote for a year or so before he regressed. He sent a letter shortly after Mabel Mercer's passing that contained a note for Mom, the glorious Ms. Mercer's obituary published and his tribute below:

Hi Lee,

I took considerable license as far as facts go in this tribute to this woman...felt you deserved and would appreciate having a copy of this effort...in spite of certain errors. Hope things are going well for you. I will leave it to Tim if he wishes to give you my address...I have no objection. Should you choose to write me, please understand my replies will be infrequent because I am going to college and working...leaving little time for correspondence, at least for the next three months.

Warmest Regards, Tom

Singer Mabel Mercer Dies of Heart Ailment (April 20th, 1984)

PITTSFIELD, Mass. (UPI)

Mabel Mercer, 84, who was given the Medal of Freedom by President Reagan last year as one of the most influential popular singing talents of her time, died yesterday at the Berkshire Medical Center after a brief illness.

Miss Mercer, who suffered from a heart ailment, was a resident of East Chatham, N.Y., and had been a leading figure in the New York supper club scene since 1941.

She was long considered the doyenne of popular song. Frank Sinatra gave her credit for teaching him everything he knew about phrasing, and Cole Porter called her one of the finest interpreters of his songs.

Early this year, Stereo Review Magazine renamed its prestigious annual Award of Merit, the Mable Mercer Award. She was the first musician to receive the award in 1974.

Mabel Mercer...1900-1984 A Tribute

Mostly, she is remembered for performing sitting still in a straight chair, a light shawl over her shoulder, her delicate hands in her lap. The year was 1951 when I met her. She was standing next to the piano in a simple but elegant evening gown. The place was Spivey's Roof in New York City. Spivey's was the intimate room she preferred because she did not like to use a mike. That memorable evening for all present was the night she sang the Rogers and Hammerstein score from South Pacific before it debuted off Broadway. She gave a very light nod to her long-time accompanist, and while he played a soft lead in, she turned to Dick Rogers on her left, and said, "Thank you dear man for permitting me to sing this lovely melody of your show music for the very first public hearing."

Waiters waited, and conversations stopped as a small spotlight seemed to drape her head and shoulders, while the words, the music, filled the hearts. The minds and tear ducts filled...it was "some enchanted evening."

Mabel was not an Ella, Nancy Wilson, Peggy Lee...No, hers was a talent they came to hear and study. Most nights during a gig there was Sinatra, or Mel Torme, Dick Haymes, Billy Williams, Composers, Arrangers and the side men who would hock their instruments to be in the same room with Mabel Mercer. They all envied her phrasing, her touch with lyrics and though lacking the fine instrument of many singers, she sang and talked or sang in such a warm intimate way...birds would weep. The sometimes course though marvelous composer Frank Loesser (Guys and Dolls) was known to tear up when she did her treatment of "Sand in My Shoes."

Cole Porter would send her special stuff from his place on the Mediterranean. Ira Gershwin would fix up some lyrics from one his brother's tunes. Best of all, she wore her greatness with style, with ease.

She was a nice, although a rather plain looking woman whose lovely skin was the color of hot chocolate after the whipped cream melted. Though childless, she was motherly looking. To hear her do "My Man," you wouldn't believe she was an old maid. She was English, and her accent was faint, but classy. She was 21 years my senior the night I met her, and when I saw her last, she was 75...I just don't know how the hell she managed it. Her favorite drink was pink champagne (The Rage then), but she rarely finished a glass during her break. Her talk was generally of her flower garden and mostly with my then wife Lee who also knew her flowers...Dummy here would hum chopsticks, or doodle with my stirrer while they spoke.

She was thoughtful as well as gracious; those times we would catch her at the Blue Angel she would always manage to break into a song we liked...Bob Haymes' "That's All", Ellington's "Prelude to a Kiss" or a Peggy Lee's favorite, "The Folks Who Live on the Hill." We took such pride and pleasure in her remembered recognition of us.

So good night, dear lady. Honest, I will try to be so good so I can catch your act up there, a once more, as Count Basie tells it. Humble the angels with your treatment of Ave Maria.

A Grateful Fan

Written or transcribed from hard copy in 2003 after finding my father's note in my mother's papers after she passed.

Aunts and Uncles

My family is not a traditional family, including my aunts and uncles. My Mother was old enough to be my grandmother and had one older sister and brother who died when I was a toddler and before I was born. My Dad had one sister Julie, who was younger than him and they didn't get along well. I only met her a couple times. With this background, my true Aunts and Uncles were not related but were instead the closest friends of my parents. They were Uncle Jack and Aunt Helen, and Uncle Don and Aunt Pauline over my entire childhood and beyond.

When I was very young, Aunt Helen and Uncle Jack lived in Atlantic Highlands, NJ in an older, large, very comfortable home on a bluff overlooking the Ocean with NYC in the distance. The

beach was far down the bluff and was treacherous. That was relative, as I was young and mountains often were barely hills. We were sitting at Aunt Helen's kitchen room table when I was about seven and drinking milk. She made me laugh as she often did, and the milk snorted out my nose. It was so uncomfortable, but she couldn't stop laughing as Mom joined in. Aunt Helen was funny, with Uncle Jack mostly serious.

Uncle Jack had a slight build and was always well dressed. He was so just so smart. He spoke with wisdom and absoluteness. He commuted to the city (Manhattan for those that don't know!) to work in a management position at the phone company. Yes, there used to be one. Aunt Helen was loving and had that great laugh, even though she wasn't as loud as Aunt Pauline and more refined yet not really refined all in one. They had one son named Harold who was years out of their house before I became Timmie to his parents. He traveled the world as a Merchant Marine. I only met him once and being so impressed by his uniform and all the shiny and colorful ribbons and pins. As a young adult, he had a colostomy, but it never held him back from being a ship captain. He wrote letters to my mom throughout her life long after his parents passed away. He was a very thoughtful man.

My Mom was almost eight years older than my dad. Aunt Helen was a few years older than her and Uncle Jack maybe ten years older than that. When I was maybe eleven, Uncle Jack retired, and they moved to Cape Cod. We visited them a couple times with my father, but mostly without him. Uncle Jack and I bonded even more during those visits, including almost a month with them while Mom was home in NJ when I was 13 going on 14 in the summer of 1968. He was like the grandfather I never had. He took me fishing for fish and more so eels that I eventually ate...and enjoyed.

They had a basement with a large billiards table (billiards not pool), and I relished the many hours playing with him. He was a student of the game, and those angles required for those multi-cushion shots that helped make me a very good pool player, particularly those bank shots. Unlike my father, he was patient with me. All of us enjoyed hours at a time in the evening playing dominos where multiples of five were points. He won a substantial majority of the time as I did years later with Mom and my kids thanks to watching and learning from him. I remember how proud he was when I started to win.

I remember the Cape Cod beaches fondly, maybe not the cold water that only got warm a couple weeks a year when the jet stream was near, and I wasn't. I recall the laughs about the Shitz family up the street when we passed their mailbox and Mom saying, "Why don't they spell it will two T's," forgetting it had a z. My first date was that summer seeing a second showing of Romeo and Juliet at a local downtown theater. Uncle Jack passed away when I was in my early twenties and Aunt Helen remarried. For years, Mom would share letters from Aunt Helen, who was always asking for me. Eventually her letters became difficult to read and painful for Mom as she developed Alzheimer's. She passed away a few years before Mom.

Aunt Pauline and Uncle Don were so much different than Uncle Jack and Aunt Helen. First, Aunt Pauline was much younger, maybe 16 years younger than Mom. Uncle Don was my father's best friend and a year older than him. Uncle Don was tall and of French heritage, with large dark eyebrows, a stern look, and a matter-of-fact approach to life. He worked as a

supervisor and technician in a dental manufacturing facility. Dad met Uncle Don when he got his first dentures in his early 30's. When they were in their mid-thirties, Uncle Don was sick, and Dad stayed with him for nearly a week and nursed him to health. Uncle Don reminded me of that more than once with our less frequent visits in my teens without my father.

We visited Thanksgivings until I turned 14. Uncle Don and my father shot skeet nearby as Mom and Aunt Pauline cooked. Much to my chagrin, everyone got great pleasure from dressing me up. Their home was not that large and the small bedroom I stayed in at the top of the stairs was close to the living room below. I enjoyed listening to the jovial banter and stories, once a while interrupted by an argument between Don and my father. They drank excessively at times, scotch, or whiskey mostly and were very loud and boisterous.

We visited the summer after my junior year in high school, just as I was to get my first car, and college was a topic of conversation. Due to her pride and because she did not want to diminish my father in front of Uncle Don, Mom did not share much about my father with them, like his forgery of documents with her signature to sell property with those funds that had been targeted for my college education. For sure, she didn't share that I was the one working full time, not her, and that I paid the mortgage and most other household expenses. On the ride there, she kept reminding me not to bring these things up in conversations over the next couple of days.

I spent so much of the time on this trip with Uncle Don, way more than we ever did one on one. He treated me like a son when I didn't have a father in my life, and I recall wishing that to be the case. He offered to buy my first car at a place near their home, a Buick Riviera with that big 455 motor. He knew little of our financial situation but sensed that things were a challenge as Mom was a mess after the divorce. I couldn't tell him I could not go away to college or the underlying financial reasons why as Mom needed my literal and figurative support. I couldn't tell him that I had many full scholarships offered for Basketball that I had to decline to keep my good job to support Mom. Before we left, he offered to pay for all four years of my college tuition if I went to Denison University in Ohio and lived with his son, a professor there. I had to decline to keep my promise to Mom.

About eighteen months later Uncle Don died of cancer, an inoperable brain tumor. In a visit with Aunt Pauline in the summer of 2002 with Chris, we discussed Uncle Don in detail. She told me that he knew of the tumor for a couple of years before telling her to spare her since nothing could be done. He also knew about his tumor when I was there the summer that I turned seventeen as he tried to be there for me, and I couldn't share why I couldn't accept his generous offers. Knowing would not have changed the results or the facts. He only told Aunt Pauline about the tumor after he regressed to the point where his pain was obvious, and it affected his great mind.

Mom's health was slipping during my last visit with Aunt Pauline in 2002, some 45 years since my first visit. Mom had told me something I never knew just before Chris, and I visited. When she was dating my father initially, she lived in Manhattan and he lived in Connecticut and drove up one Saturday to see "the boys," Don and Tom (my father) in their apartment in Bridgeport. The three of them went to a parade one day (she couldn't remember the holiday) with Don the odd man out. She noticed Aunt Pauline by herself across the street and pointed her out to the single Uncle Don. He agreed she was cute, so Mom waited for a break (not that she needed one)

in the parade and crossed the street and approached her, saying, “Hi Mary.” Of course, this wasn’t mom’s fictional friend Mary, but a conversation progressed on how much she looked like Mary. Mom then invited her to join them across the Street. Hence, I had an Uncle Don and an Aunt Pauline.

Aunt Pauline had gotten older quite gracefully. She was sharp, the Aunt Pauline I remembered as a small child. The house itself was unchanged; except for the overgrown apple orchard in the rear of the property that was so wild you couldn’t see the lake anymore, or more so the pond that the adult I was now knew it to be. She still had that wide smile and giving nature, as well as those couple of scotch on the rocks every night, but she swore the doctor said she was fine and that she had his endorsement. I hesitated to believe that, but I then glanced over my shoulder and saw that picture of Uncle Don, and the stern and tell it like it is look, and accepted all was well.

November 2002 and April 2020

Postscript: After I wrote this, I spoke with my older sister Anne (my father’s daughter) who remembered that Dad met Don when he made Dad’s false teeth at a young age. The parade Mom had mentioned was likely the Barnum Festival Parade on July 4th in Bridgeport.

A Five-Year-Old’s View of Heaven

While my grandchildren do not attend church or bible study as Papa (me) would like, my daughter “gets it,” meaning she lives and interacts with others (almost always) as the Bible intends. This story of her daughter and my granddaughter Olivia’s glimpse of heaven has hopefully opened the door to discussions of heaven. So, for Christmas, I got her three children’s books on this topic and one more for her younger cousin.

Part One

My granddaughter Olivia turned five only a month ago and entered kindergarten around the same time. Her mom, my daughter Katie, and Olivia had a conversation in which Olivia asked, “Mommy, where is Papa’s Mommy?”

Katie answered, “Papa’s Mommy is in Heaven, Olivia.”

Olivia continued with her burgeoning deductive skills as she thought of April, Katie’s Chihuahua of over 10 years that passed away about a year ago, as she matter-of-factly told her Mommy, “That’s good because then Papa’s Mommy can take care of April in Heaven.”

October 10, 2019

Part Two

On Friday, November 22nd, after Katie’s first parent/teacher conference during the school year, Olivia’s kindergarten teacher, a young man substituting for her regular teacher who was on maternity leave showed Katie a picture Olivia had drawn during the first week of school.

Because Olivia's drawing was better than most, the teacher asked Olivia to speak and show her drawing to the class. As Olivia pointed to each part of the drawing, she explained, "That is me right here. Above my head (in a cloud with April inside) is me thinking of April in Heaven," she started.

"Thinking of what?" he asked.

"I am thinking about my doggie in heaven," Olivia said.

The teacher then turned to Katie after retelling the story and said, "This is one of the most wonderful things any child has ever done in my class. This is why I am a teacher."

At this point, both Katie and the teacher had to collect themselves from the emotion of the discussion before he took out the next drawing from Olivia's folder, a second picture that was done more than two months after the first but showing the same scene. There will be two more done before the school year ends so the teacher(s) can then compare and see the progress in detail and in writing throughout the year on the same picture done four times. The teacher continued, "This is the most progress I have ever seen from the first to the second drawing. She is so smart and such a willing learner," he finished. Katie said the handwriting was perfect on most words that were illegible just two plus months before.

The conversation shifted to socialization, something Katie and I have been a bit concerned about as we have asked Olivia about her closest friends and didn't get much response on the topic. The teacher continued, "It seems that Olivia and Lianna have become best friends. They are the two smartest children in class and always get assignments right and done first. They have a friendly competition between them on who does the best class work, and that competition helps learning a lot. She is also friends with Alexis (a boy). Both play with Olivia often," he finished.

When she got home from the parent/teacher conference, Katie had a conversation with Olivia. Of course, she enthusiastically told her how proud she was of her. I have written on the importance of being proud when you are a parent, since while you love your children every day and moment, being proud occurs much less often. Somehow, like for my mom with me, and my kids for me, being satisfied and fulfilled in them is as meaningful as anything. I am reaffirmed and thankful to the Lord that still applies as a proud emotional Papa must pause to collect himself.

As the conversation continued at home, Mom asked about Lianna and then Alexis. After mentioning Alexis as her friend, Olivia exclaimed, "It's not like I'm his girlfriend or anything!"

"What does that mean?" Katie asked Olivia.

"It means a boy and girl fall in love," she finished. Katie and I laughed at this but were still surprised at the logic shown by a five-year-old. After we hung up, I said to myself, "If only all adult boyfriends and girlfriends established relationships on falling in love as the Lord intends."

November 23, 2019

Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Early Influence

The 60's were a turbulent time yet also a time of positive and radical change. On November 22, 1963, the assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK) occurred as the civil rights movement was starting to gain momentum, or at least national news exposure. At nine years old, I clearly remember November 22, 1963, the day JFK was shot. When the news was released to the students just after school ended for the day, a group of older girls tripped over me as they ran out of school in tears. Perhaps it's ironic that Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) stepped in as our President. If he hadn't, we might not have much of the civil rights legislation that was hammered through Congress by the tough as nails LBJ.

I regularly watched CBS news although sometimes my mother would have me get up (yes, no remotes!) and change the channel to ABC or NBC to see what other broadcasters were saying. I do the same with today's cable news even though I have a preferred news channel just like CBS and Walter Cronkite was for us when I grew up. She knew the news was social studies and living history rolled into one. When JFK was shot, Mom kept me home for almost a week with little breaks to play as we were glued to the television to watch the ongoing coverage.

When MLK either appeared or spoke on the news, Mom always commented that he was a very important man and that he should be held with utmost respect. When we watched the "I Have a Dream" speech, tears streamed down her cheeks and mine. Hence, when Martin Luther King (MLK) was assassinated on April 4, 1968, I again stayed home from school for almost a full week to watch the news and see what unfolded.

Of course, MLK was a preacher and a teacher, a man that championed peace in general but particularly peaceful protest. Surely, whether black or white, the majority of those who admired MLK would find it ironic that riots broke out in mostly black neighborhoods in cities all over America after his assassination, more as a sign of exasperation over his loss as it was another form of protest. He must have looked down and found these times to be another level of pain in the pursuit of Right and Righteous freedom for all.

It was during this period that freedom of the press seemed to grow in print and TV access as we saw the riots and the Vietnam War through firsthand accounts, let alone the violence in protests at times that followed his loss or at Kent State related to the war. Plus, MLK's loss and impact also resulted in many people coming together to do God's work and in *Loving All Brothers and Sisters*, including those with deeper pockets and lighter skins.

When the song "Abraham, Martin and John" was released in 1968 just after his assassination, it resonated so much that to this day it's one of only a few songs that I can remember every single word from beginning to end and find myself singing a cappella. While I truly have enjoyed karaoke for the last 30 years, I am almost always screen-dependent otherwise!

I turned 14 a couple of months after MLK was assassinated and continued to be a student of the news, reading newspapers almost every day during my break from the Deli and convenience store where I worked, and watching the evening news when my work schedule permitted. I

remember we almost always sold out of the Hunterdon County weekly paper and the NY Daily News, but usually had the Newark Star Ledger and almost always had a copy or two of the New York Times to read almost daily. We didn't have the proliferation of news of today, and news was mostly apolitical unlike today.

By the early 70's, when asked who I thought were the greatest Americans, I almost always had only three names: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King. To this day, I firmly believe they are the top three Americans in our history.

Greatness in a society or country should be measured by lasting impact in a Godly way. That means effectuating the most positive change for the most people who need that change, namely the needy and underprivileged that seem to grow in numbers in general but more so based on the color of one's skin as the rich get richer. By this measurement I am reaffirmed in my belief that Martin Luther King is one of the three greatest Americans in our history.

July 21, 2019

Postscript

I write this postscript after seeing some statistics on inequality based on race in literal black and white ways, including print on the screen at church comparing black and white populations on income, education, and other disparities that Martin Luther King expressed, with a handful of his expressions in quotes before stats in the extreme disparities in so many ways that still exist.

Pastor Stephanie's sermon was called When You Reach the End. She quoted from Martin Luther King's 1963 book *Strength to Love* early in the sermon and left us with the turmoil and readiness in leading the fight in Montgomery for equality focused on busing. After several great connect the dots to the world and country we live in today, Pastor Stephanie continued that when MLK was writing his book over strong coffee and late-night prayers, he became more resolute than ever to stay centered in God's expectation of being loving as part of seeking justice and more.

We all need reminders that MLK's work was God's work, and that God's work in so many forms must be done proactively to truly walk His walk. We need reminders that there is so much work to do in so many ways including true equality on many levels. We must *Love All Brothers and Sisters*, and we must speak up and stand up for change so that all are treated equally by our governments, schools, companies, healthcare providers and more.

January 19, 2020

Seven Positive Principles

Introduction

I wrote these principles in May 2002. Like most written before 2007, it was and still is not faith centered yet I believe I could study the bible and make a case for each principle to follow as we have a God of hope, and hope is connected to positivity. As mentioned in *Leona, Mom and*

Nana...Giving Ever Lasting, my primary influence was my mom and that included her predominately positive nature.

I started to accelerate my writing as a promise to myself after September 11th and started sharing many things written the next year with Mom. Sometimes I would leave stuff to read with her, but occasionally, I asked her to read something I had written while I was there. I recall that almost sheepish way she would smile at times that told you she was proud of you. including after reading *Seven Positive Principles*.

1. Silver Lining

We have all heard the saying that clouds have a silver lining. Clouds are ominous, threatening, and the resulting storms can be dangerous and unpredictable. Still, crops and nature need the rain that results from those clouds, a somewhat literal translation of a “silver lining.”

In all negative outcomes, we need to look for the positives that result. That usually requires time passing after the negative event or loss to be able to find the silver lining. You can’t deny the tragedy of 9/11 and the direct personal losses for so many. Notwithstanding, many other lives have been changed for the positive in various ways, like giving back to society for the rest of their lives to positively benefit others, making career changes that are positive for many others, or re-prioritizing what is important in their life, the latter the case for me.

Silver linings allow you to balance life’s unavoidable negative events that often happen in bunches. Therefore, positive principal number one is that *no matter what befalls you, aggressively seek the silver lining*.

2. Keep the good and throw out (most of) the bad with the bath water, and

3. Learn from positive and negative experiences

“Keep the good and throw out the bad with the bath water” was something my mother always said, except for “most of” above. Later in her glorious life, she threw out all the bad in her expressions of my father. Of course, for our wellbeing and happiness, it is important to not dwell on negative memories or experiences, but to focus on the positive.

Do not “throw out” or disregard all those bad experiences. They should also teach and remind us of the bad intent of others and the potential negative consequences that we want to avoid. Many disappointing and negative memories of my father continue to remind me what *not* to do with my kids, creating great value for them whether they know it or not.

I have had many negative experiences in my business life. Greed and ego are two human traits that are unavoidable and have resulted in unfortunate actions of many people that I trusted to varied degrees, including friends and business partners that acted with bad intent including lies, thefts and behind my back efforts.

No matter how many times my faith and trust in people is breached, I vow to never enter a relationship without a presumed element of trust and belief that man is inherently good. Predominately, negativity must be put behind us or thrown out if you will. Yes, remember the negativity and learn from it, but put it in the back of your mind and not the forefront, and you'll bounce back quickly and be better for it. Remember positive principal numbers two and three to *learn from positive and negative experiences and focus on the positive experiences, and not the opposite.*

4. Don't dwell on the inconsequential, and

5. Find a release

The ability to disregard the truly unimportant things in life is easier said than done. It is so common to let a small incident or a stranger being inconsiderate on the road carry forward into your bad attitude for the day or longer. How we address the little things that crop up every day has a long-term impact on our well-being. When something small happens, let alone more than small, let it go, and let it go quickly. Most things should "roll off your back."

There are various ways to diminish or dismiss inconsequential negativity. One way, complaining and venting, can be healthy to a degree for some if not overdone. Humor is an even better option, like joking about the silliness of someone's negative statements, actions, or otherwise. Even sarcastic humor is a good release. There are plenty of immediate releases, so that we can remember positive principal number four, *don't sweat the small things.*

There are many things that make us happy or that provide a release, or the means to distance us from an inconsequential or consequential negative occurrence. For some, music soothes the soul. For others, exercise is the answer. Chatting with a friend or family member may help you release negative energy, but just don't "pass it on" in your negative expressions to a selected few or an individual. Find what works for you, particularly when negative influences can be more pronounced. Positive principal number five is something we know we must do; *we must release the negative energy and experiences.*

6. Avoid excess negativity and seek positive surroundings

Surround yourself with predominantly positive people whenever possible. Find happy and pleasant surroundings whenever possible, enjoying whatever you enjoy; the great outdoors, sports, museums, movies or whatever. Obviously, it is much easier to be positive when you are around positive people in enjoyable places, positioned to have fun and enjoy life.

Seek to avoid negativity whenever and wherever possible. Of course, unless you are financially independent, that can be difficult at work. Friends and family that are too negative should be those that you spend less time with. Sometimes, eventually a friend should become an ex-friend if you cannot turn around their ongoing negativity. We cannot let others drag us down to their level. Hence, positive principal number six is to *avoid excess negativity and seek positive surroundings.*

7. Take actions for a positive change in your life

Positive Mental Attitude (PMA) is a powerful tool if we can harness that energy. There are various types of learned behavior that can increase your positive attitudes and behavior, including these “principals” of positive behavior. Human beings are a unique species in that we are capable of change more than any other species on earth. The first thing we must ask ourselves is “Do we want to change?” If you just answered yes, then the next question is, “Will I make an effort to change?” If you answer yes again, you are well on the way to moving forward with positivity in your life. Have you completed a plan to change for the better? Are you willing to look within for the purpose of change? If yes again, you have now started to address the most important positive principle, lucky number seven, which is to *take actions for a positive change in your life*.

Conclusion

We must focus on the positive. We must remember to put negativity quickly behind us and move forward to the next encounter with positive intent, expectations, and a smile. See that silver lining, as part of the small and big picture. Be proactive. Embrace change as a positive process. All this can be challenging, but living these seven positive principles will help us to lead a happier and more fulfilled life.

May 2002 and July 5th, 2019

Uncomfortable to Be Comfortable

My Mom always spoke “straight from the hip” as they used to say. She did so if she liked you and if she didn’t. She was rarely soft spoken. She had a regular “edge.” She could make you as comfortable as a big soft couch, or uncomfortable as well.

I am my mother’s son even though I have far less of an edge in my increasing walk with the Lord. Jesus’ questioning others to make them uncomfortable until they gained righteous understanding in many cases, but not all. *Jesus Questioned and So Should We*.

In *Personal and Professional Test*, I wrote of the most uncomfortable time of my life in 2002/2003. There were challenging times thereafter, with most directly or indirectly a result of the year off to do public advocacy work. Since all that occurred at that time (or otherwise) was God-given, God made me uncomfortable and then very uncomfortable both personally and financially, which affected my family, those I loved and all-important aspects of my life. He did so to heal me and to eventually become appropriately and emotionally comfortable. Clearly, we must:

1. Be uncomfortable when there are righteous reasons, as in standing up for social injustice and people as Jesus would see it.
2. Be uncomfortable to heal from our past and/or present, and therefore eventually find true comfort and greater happiness.

In *An Inquisitive Approach to Life and Love*, I wrote about Neil Selden. Neil was soft-spoken but very direct with his questions. A simple “How are you today?” somehow seemed probing for the right reasons as he looked you straight in the eye. Most people are uncomfortable when something(s) weigh on them, many tend to keep important things inside to be as comfortable as possible. Neil’s goal as a psychologist and a man of faith was to heal. We must become uncomfortable to heal to then become most comfortable (psychologically and in Him) and, therefore, happy. Healing is worthy as a Christian but also no matter our faith.

Therefore, I have become more comfortable in making others uncomfortable as a *Born Again and Again* Christian. Again, this means doing all (or as much as humanly possible) things for Right and Righteous reasons including *The Pursuit of Healing* in others after deep thought and prayer.

My beloved mother had her “beating a dead horse” topics, which she could not let go of because she saw them as “right.” She was usually right and sometimes righteous yet usually did not consider related repercussions. We must be measured in prompting others.

In April 2018. I read Pastor David D. Ireland’s 20th book, *One in Christ* (Bridging Racial and Cultural Divides). The first chapter, *Route 316*, as in lovingly living the Great Commission for “all nations” has several sections with the final one titled “The Benefits of Confrontation.” Pastor Ireland’s focus was confronting ourselves, which means making ourselves uncomfortable and therefore likely others with healing intent. For me, this was a worthy reaffirmation.

We must change to be healed by being uncomfortable to become comfortable. People, nations, and societies need change in Him as never before. The polarization in our society needs to change. We have responsibilities and challenges (confrontations) in fulfilling worthy pursuits despite *Greed and Ego Run Amuck* or other societal or life challenges. Don’t let a hectic life with imperfect priorities get in the way of doing the right thing(s).

We must make people uncomfortable to be part of the change in understanding and correcting injustices and inequalities. I pray I can be a small part of that through speaking and writing of a God of love and all the values and beliefs that emanate from that love.

April 12, 2018, and March 30, 2021

Two Visions of America

I am an American. That means *all* America including all Indian nations, the first Dutch and English immigrants, the Irish and their tenements, the Chinese as borderline slave labor and eventually the enslaved Africans - we’re *all* Americans despite our paths to this country. However, our America is fractured largely because of the political environment, with that more so the case in places like the “heartland.”

I hold no prejudices and embrace our differences, but sometimes I forget where I am. Tonight I stayed at a hotel in St Peters, Missouri, a western suburb of St. Louis. There were not many restaurant choices nearby and I was hungry. A pub nearby was at the end of a mall and was very

much a local establishment. There were plenty of TVs, half for Trivia Night and half for the Cardinals game with \$2 shots of cherry vodka for every Cardinal homer. There was an empty seat between Ronnie, a stocky 35 to 40-year-old man and me. He was struggling with trivia. I helped him get a few questions right. We ended up chatting and I spoke about my long and in process road trip which would include passing through Birmingham.

He said, "On the way to Daytona, we stayed in Birmingham. I remember sitting on church steps at 4:00am while I wondered where my hotel was."

I should have more carefully considered my response since there were 200 people in the place on Trivia Night and, other than a Hispanic busboy, there was no one of color as I said, "As a born-again Christian who embraces all Americans, I'm planning on attending church Sunday morning in Birmingham and found a church where Martin Luther King had preached." (16th Street Baptist that was also bombed three times in the 60's during the civil rights movement.)

That ended our conversation as I moved on to my meal. He continued with trivia when his friend Eric arrived and sat between us. He was a muscular guy with many tattoos including a flag on his left arm.

I finished my meal and I asked, "Do you work in construction?"

He answered, "No. what do you do?"

I answered, "I work in development as a consultant."

"I build Harleys," he said.

My response was sincere when I said, "That sounds like it would be fun. God Bless."

His response was beyond shocking when he said, "If I had my knife on me, I'd stab you in the heart until it stuck out your back and you bled to death."

I hesitated and softly said, "Excuse me" as a knee jerk reaction. He repeated himself and added "and I'd twist it good to see you die in pain." I had already paid my bill so was ready for a quick exit. I looked behind me as I closed the door and hustled to my car.

Ronnie had surely told Eric what I had said. As white as I am, when I expressed myself as I did, I became a black or brown person in the eyes of an existing and growing segment regressing in righteousness and Godliness for all.

May 2019

An Artistic Existence

Introduction

What is art anyway? What is artistic to you may be repulsive to someone else. Most of us have very different tastes and preferences for styles, art and other aspects of life. I enjoy a wide spectrum of creative expression and art, from abstract to realism and all in between.

As mentioned in *Lee Bradley's and the Pieta*, for several years I lived in an early American home that was an art gallery, antique shop, restaurant and our home. The Pieta showing and gallery gave me an early appreciation of old-world artists that I have retained to this day. Mom spoke in revered tones about artistic cousin Penrod who was 22 years my senior. We visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Manhattan galleries often. I began thinking of myself as an artist living in Lee Bradley's, where my mother taught art classes to people as diverse as gray-haired blue bloods or long-haired beatniks, the predecessors to hippies.

At six, I looked at a small map of Alaska on my right and recreated it three times larger on my left. As a young lefty, I could replicate beloved geographic and geometric shapes at will. At seven, I fell off the monkey bars outside school, breaking my left arm in several places. It was this fall that made me right-handed. I remain a left sided thinker, but my hand eye coordination that translated into an ability to draw a straight line or duplicate shapes in all sizes (like a realist painter) to paper was entirely lost.

After officially becoming right-handed, without that ability for reality in artistic expression, I was transformed into drawing abstract shapes. Hence, I went from being a surrealist to a modern artist at a young age.

At 13, I stopped painting after the closing of Lee Bradley's when my mom almost died in the car crash. My love for art never waned. After visiting many museums and galleries in the United States, I yearn for visits to the Louvre, museums in Florence and other cities that were home to many great artists.

Living Art

Art is not just paintings, sculptures, collages, or whatever medium artists' favor. Art is all around us in the God given sensory abilities we possess and our surroundings. A great artist said that art comes from the brain, not the hand. Living is visual with an open awareness and appreciation of our surroundings. Art is everywhere. It is in photographs, as well as the snapshots our brain produces moment to moment.

"Living Art" is available for us all to see every day, like the gorgeous sunset I saw last night driving west from downtown Phoenix. The sky had a series of clouds shaped like long fingers reaching out. They were varied widths and lengths, with streaks of hues from bright pink to purple, with those closer to the eye reminiscent of pastels, and those further in the horizon brighter and more vivid, almost fluorescent, all with a backdrop of bright and brighter blue.

Only a couple of days before after a large storm left the area, the evening sky was radically different, dominated by large puffy clouds layered upon each other with varied shades of gray. In the background and off to the side, there were some wispy streaks of clouds, with hazy purple influences and traces of blue behind in the distance. Just a day later, a visit to Sedona offered awesome shapes of the landscape, with reds and oranges overtaking and intermingling with the bright blue sky until the once again wonderful but different sunset. All these skies were gorgeous, inspiring, and yet so different in their heavenly examples of living art.

If you are in California on visits to parts of the central to northern coasts, the sea may greet the mountains at the shore or a Redwood Forest close to the beach has fathoms of light reaching for your toes. Then there is Yosemite or Tahoe, both so different yet inspiring on the same high levels for me. There are of course many more California “artistic” destinations. How you experience the living art of the great outdoors depends on your mood, your attitude and where you are at the time. Beauty is everywhere. Is a fall day in New England or even my home state of New Jersey any less inspiring? Guess depends where in Joisey.

In her 70’s, my mother initially complained when she moved from a ranch home to the seventh floor of a subsidized housing building, but she soon she was admiring and taking pictures of the sunsets from her balcony as part of her artistic living for the rest of her life. She and my brother exchanged many pictures of sunsets from each coast, and none was less or more beautiful, only different. Mom told us that the clouds she viewed from her balcony were some known shapes or another. Still, only she and Megan could easily see the bunny. Yes, Mother Nature provides us with a display of living art almost wherever we may be.

Creatures and people also provide us with living art. Most of us enjoy “people watching” as a past time, whether in downtown San Francisco or the Mission District, in Central Park or Greenwich Village. There is such diversity in humanity to enjoy and how uniquely human qualities manifest themselves in everyday life. People are living art that should be celebrated and savored on their own within the contrasts from architecture to nature.

Conclusion

Art is in everyday life when our eyes and brain act and interact like the cameras of Ansel Adams or Annie Liebowitz. Living life to the fullest extent enhances and develops one’s abilities as an artist or to just appreciate art and therefore life. In conclusion, live an artistic existence, support art and artists when you can, enjoy what God and creative minds have created for prosperity and for you too. Enjoy everyday surroundings in nature and in people, the fleeting and enduring moments, one and all. Live an artistic existence.

Written February 19, 2003, while “stuck” in Phoenix during the great northeast storm

Postscript

Inspired by my painting with my granddaughters over the last few years, I have started painting again. Abstracts mostly, as straight lines and I do not see eye to eye.

The Judge

The summer after my freshman year in High School, I worked full time for two months as a helper for a home being remodeled for a local attorney and judge, Mr. Bruce Herrigal. Mom had met him the previous year when he had been the attorney for the purchase of our home. He had purchased an older farmhouse near Clinton on a large property with barns and a pond in the rear of the property. The house needed serious repair, and he took off much of that summer to work on the house himself and oversee subcontractors putting in new plumbing, heat, and electricity. I was often his helper. This gave us ample time to chat about all kinds of things, including law and business, but everyday stuff, too. He made me feel I was a part of his family.

I had little contact with the Judge after high school, although I did reach out to him when I was nineteen and he did try to influence Mom at the Deli. She only heard the echo from the whiskey bottle then (she quit drinking almost three years later) and he could not influence her. I did go on to college and due to his influence; I initially thought I wanted to be an attorney. I soon after got into the real estate business and met many attorneys, but none could live up to the standards the Judge set in my eyes, and I went alternative direction(s).

Written in 2004

Black Irish and St. Patrick's Day

When Megan was young, we attended many wonderful St. Patrick's Day parades in Belmar. She was quite the center of attention with her long, flowing, curly red hair. She was the spitting image of Little Orphan Annie, only cuter. Of course, green, and red do go very well together on St. Patrick's Day or any other day. One year when she was three and my father lived in Belmar, she spent most of the parade on his shoulders watching everything go by, laughing, smiling, and with such joy. It seemed every passer by noticed her, and many took her picture on the shoulders of this red faced and white-haired man with the funny green hat.

Yes, St. Patrick's is an opportunity for a party and any Irishman worth his salt would drink himself to near oblivion. I never was much for green beer or corn beef and cabbage, but I didn't need an excuse for a party when I was younger and attended a few parades that may be considered the Grand Daddy of them all, the New York St. Patrick's Day Parade. When I was 19, I went with some friends and the goal was how many pubs we could visit that day, which was surely double digits.

By the time Megan was born and thereafter, the holiday became one for the kids but less and less as they got older. In 1997, I was in NYC for a business meeting, and had completely forgotten that I had scheduled this meeting on this green day. I managed to avoid traffic getting to this meeting by coming into the city through the Holland instead of the Lincoln tunnel and getting on the east side of the parade route with a parking spot only three blocks from the just ending parade.

As I headed to my meeting, I seized the perfect opportunity for sidewalk souvenir purchases for the kids at a table run by a couple of black guys doing their best to be Africanize. Their mood

perked up when I started to pay and the gentleman on my right saw my \$2 bill on the outside of my billfold. "Can I buy that from you," he asked.

I advised him that was my one and only superstition, keeping that \$2 bill on the outside of my billfold and concluded, "Sorry, no."

He then reached under the table and pulled out a huge, enlarged replica of a \$2 bill in plastic sheathing, and pointed to a signer of the declaration on the back and said, "See this man here, he was a Moor, a black man, and he was a signer of the declaration of independence, something your history books will never tell you."

I responded, "I know some history about Moors because they invaded Spain, and then Ireland somewhere around the 10th or 11th century. I have a family crest called O Caside from my half Irish father that tells me I am of Moorish descent to some degree. Irish people with dark hair like me have been called Black Irish ever since. So, I guess we just might be related way back, huh?"

He hesitated and then burst into laughter, and said, "OK, brother." We hugged, and I went on my way.

March 2002

A Promise is a Promise

When I was eleven and living in *Lee Bradley's*, I received one of those chain letters that promised good luck or fortune if you mailed it to others and suggested bad luck if you didn't.

My mother had many highbrow patrons, including a lady I called Ms. B versus the four syllables of her name that I couldn't pronounce well. She lived on an estate that was not far from the home of our former first lady, Jackie Onassis. One day, Ms. B. came into the shop later in the day as she wanted to be sure I was there after school. In her hand was a crumpled-up letter, which she slowly straightened out after she sat me down at the table in the private dining room and stated to Mom, "I need a one-on-one discussion with Timmy." I hated being called Timmy as much as being scolded. "You sent this chain letter to me, didn't you?" she asked.

Her voice was stern with a capital S, so I responded with my best manners, "Yes Ms. B."

"Well, let me explain something to you. This letter tells me I am going to have bad luck if I don't send it to at least ten others and good luck if I do. Maybe I believe in luck, maybe I don't, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that it is an imposition to send it to a friend, let alone put them on the spot to have to send to others. More so, it is an imposition and wrong that you sent it to me. Do you understand, Timmy?" she asked with eyes that were beyond piercing.

"Yes, I understand," I responded as sheepishly as humanly possible.

"I certainly hope so because I am very upset at you. I thought you were a smart boy. You are, aren't you?" she asked.

“My teachers say so, math for sure,” I answered.

“Well, I believe you are smart, and I also believe you understand the importance of not imposing on people. Tell me Timmy, what is important to you?” she questioned.

“My Mom is the most important,” I answered quickly.

“I supposed that to be the case. What else,” she continued.

“I enjoy watching sports, collecting coins and bottles, and I love my pets, Tao number three and Penny number two,” I said.

“Well then, I want you to make me a promise. Will you do that?” she asked.

“Yes, Ms. B,” I responded with thoughts of what a good customer she was for my mom and how we sure needed good customers, with my father off the deep end of late.

“First, why do you call your pets number two and number three?” she asked with keen interest.

“Our first Penny was a collie; she died when I was four, and we felt we had to name our next dog Penny. This is our third cat named Tao because someone told me it meant Tim in French when I was little, but it means something else,” I explained.

“I see. I suspect you will have more dogs and cats with these names and more that will be important to you in your life, so on their well-being and behalf, I want you to promise to God that you will never impose on anyone ever again including sending these awful chain letters no matter what wonderful things they may promise,” she said in a serious life and death tone.

I hesitated a bit as I thought of Mom’s stories about promises, like the goulash recipe from the queen of Hungary’s personal chef that she ended up taking to her grave and said, “Yes. Ms. B.”

“That is not good enough,” she admonished. She was silent for a couple seconds that seemed like forever with that stare of hers and then continued, “You must repeat every word of the promise as I stated it. Do you want me to repeat it?” she asked.

“No Ms. B, that is not necessary,” I said before I repeated every word slowly and with emphasis of my promise that could impact my beloved pets. She was satisfied and then chatted with my mother, telling her of our talk. All my mother said later was, “Remember, a promise is a promise.”

Chain letters lost their luster and became few and far between in my adult years. Then the Internet bloomed, emails replaced letters, and then chain emails began to grow exponentially in cyberspace like mold in a cheese factory that had all its refrigeration fail.

Promises are commitments, our word, and our bond. Keeping a promise is honorable and not doing so is the opposite. While I needed that reminder on top of Mom's lessons as an 11-year-old, keeping my word and promises became one of the core values that Mom instilled in me that has lasted a lifetime.

When Mom was about twenty and got some money from modeling, she went on a two-week vacation to a well-known Catskill Mountain resort. At the pool, she met a woman vacationing from Hungary who advised she was the personal chef of the queen of Hungary. Mom just had to get her recipe. She asked for days and was rebuffed, until the chef asked, "Will you promise never to share with anyone in life?" After my mom said yes, she confirmed, "Will you add to that promise that anyone includes all of your family and the children you will have one day." Mom thought briefly and agreed.

I tried a few times to get that recipe, and my brother hounded her according to Mom when I covered most expenses for her to spend a month with Ron and his family in California when she was around 70. She never budged because after all a Promise is a Promise. Mom passed in 2003, and maybe six years later I googled recipes and put together my own Hungarian Goulash recipe I have tweaked through the years. It is not much like Mom's, but I cook it in the same cast iron pot she cooked her Goulash with all the love that went into it.

September 28, 2006, July 21, 2019, and January 17, 2020

From Three Strikes to Foul Tips

Sometimes we allow influences like jealousy or misunderstanding from misguided friends or others to say or do things we shouldn't. Of course, to err is human and we all make plenty of bad choices. Nonetheless, Mom taught me that you give people second and even third chances. Indeed, we have a *Do Over God*.

Even though my mom was raised more by Uncle George (a huge Brooklyn Dodgers baseball fan) than Aunt Clara, my mom didn't know the difference between a baseball, a softball or maybe even a soccer ball. Yet somehow, she knew what "Three Strikes You're Out" meant. When I was about ten, she told me how we give people second chances, and then a third chance to make something right unless someone did something very bad like killing someone, but just three chances.

As I got older and my faith grew, I realized people were worth foul tips or foul balls, namely more and more effort(s) for someone to make something right from wrong. That said, my mother didn't raise a fool in dead end pursuits, just someone who can be silly or a bit foolish at times.

I have always had a positive attitude, but as my faith has magnified, I have come to know we all can be reclaimed, restored, and redeemed...even after demonstrating the opposite over and over. I still analyze like a perpetual psychology student, put myself in people's shoes more often and try to make the extra effort based on my faith and the view of potential positives in someone. Change is possible through Him. Worthy change is worth lots of foul balls and even added at bats after a couple strikeouts.

January 1 and July 19, 2019, April 1, 2021

A Burning Love

To further understand and appreciate the mercy and love of God, I recently read *Love Beyond Reason* by John Ortberg. My granddaughter spilled some clear liquid on about 1/3 of the book including the front cover. When I got home, I had a so-called brilliant idea to try to dry it in the microwave. Fortunately, I only tried for about 50 seconds as the entire book was steaming and smoking when I took it out amidst some noises I had never heard before from a microwave.

The next day I grabbed the book from the kitchen table and noticed that the title on the cover had burnt marks that in some cases went four to five pages deep. As I pondered the source of the burn marks, a small part of me thought, “Could it be the Lord at work with a message?” I didn’t put two and two together until I spoke with Katie later and she mentioned aluminum foil being metal and realized the title was an overlay made from aluminum. Hence, the microwave burnt the book’s title.

The lessons to be learned are certainly subjective. First, I know that accidents happen, and we must be careful. Second, we must be somewhat guarded in seeing too many things too quickly as the Lord at work before praying and pondering on those prayers. Lastly, but more importantly, this is also a likely a message from the Lord as to the depth of love that burns within us, a love on fire with thankfulness.

October 10, 2016, and July 20, 2019

Practicing Catholic

I was baptized a Catholic primarily because my father wanted to either impress or make a misguided point to his father, my grandfather. I may not agree with all Catholic practices or beliefs but have so much respect for all denominations and religions. The current Pope Francis is amazing, expressing compassion for all, crossing religious boundaries in efforts to unify.

My first wife, Nadine, was a good Catholic girl in many respects, and we were married in a Catholic church. My second wife, Margaret was also raised Catholic, wanted the same Catholic wedding but I was no longer eligible in the church’s eyes because of my first divorce. This is one of several things I don’t think makes biblical sense as we have a merciful, loving and forgiving God and expects His churches, disciples, and followers to be the same. That rigidity pushes people away from the Catholicism and other religions.

I recall many saying they are a “practicing Catholic.” While that saying has a different meaning to most, I do find myself literally practicing being a better Christian all the time. Certain actions and principles need replication to meet the Lord’s expectations for us.

No matter our religion, practice will not make us perfect, but we can never stop striving and therefore practicing acting as Godly as possible. We must yearn to learn from Him, and practice doing the Right and Righteous things in our lives every day.

February 23, 2016

Living Life Like a Pond

When I was in the 8th grade, we lived on one half of an old farmhouse made into a two family on the edge of a state park and game lands preserve for almost a year as my mother recovered from her accident. It was close to Point Mountain on a large former farm with large meadows full of deer. The pond I speak of was located after a series of fields and was close to the woods. I can still picture it in my mind.

We would be Blessed to live a life like this pond in some respects. On most days, the pond was shielded from the wind and had a smooth, calm surface all day long. Nonetheless, there were times when a leaf would land on it or an animal would disturb the surface to quench its thirst, sending ripples of different sizes in different directions. Of course, the pond has man made disturbances like the young boys who find it; pick up a rock to skip it across the surface or just throw it in to watch the splash and the ripple effects created by disturbing the surface. Just like ponds, we have people in our lives who like to disturb our calm days.

When you throw a stone into a pond, depending on the arc, the angle, size and shape of the stone, the ripple effects will always be different. Unless flat and perfectly shaped and thrown at the perfect angle, a stone thrown by a boy will not skip straight and go on and on very often. Nonetheless, oddly shaped stones, even those that are almost round, can be skipped if thrown by the right pitcher.

People in life throw stones of all shapes and sizes, too. Some are intended to do harm and others like those thrown by loved ones or the Lord are just intended as wake-up calls, reminders or prompts to make sure we do the right thing for others or ourselves. Life gets in the way at times, and we need reminders or ripples in the pond to get to a more meaningful smooth surface. Our lives should be like a pond, with disturbances and ripples in our lives fading away gently to return to that smooth surface and calm.

March 8, 2017, and April 12, 2020

A Newfound Appreciation for Mothers

It is rare to miss a day without having at least one conversation with my daughter, Katie. While we missed more day's years back when she was working, as a stay-at-home mom of a 2-year-old and pregnant with another child, I am more "part of her daily life," as my mom or Nana Lee was with me. Over the last month I have gained an even greater appreciation for Katie as she chases my granddaughter Olivia seemingly all the time despite her current pregnancy. Katie has made such a commitment and done such an amazing job as a mom. I couldn't be prouder. Now, as I edit this a year later, I am even more impressed in her juggling an even more active Olivia, four-month-old Audrey, family, Lee and friends.

As we get older and away from babies, young children and even teenagers into adult children, reminders are welcomed to give us a newfound appreciation of what it means to be a mother. It is regularly exhilarating, but also regularly overwhelming.

August 23, 2016, and July 15, 2017

A Hard Working Mom

As I have acknowledged before, my biggest fault is a lack of patience. Being aware of it puts me in a position to work on that flaw, including praying for patience often. I am more patient in the last ten years of my progressing faith and still not nearly patient enough.

In breaks from my travel, I have been reading a chapter or two of a book on prayer over breakfast, including this morning. When I got to my only choice for breakfast at 4:45AM, a Denny's in Colonial Heights, Virginia, there was only one other customer and two servers, although one server seemed inactive. The young African American lady who came to serve me was in her middle twenties. It took several minutes for her come to my table, so it would have been easy for the impatient me to make a misplaced assumption of her waitress abilities before she advised she has just put on a fresh pot of coffee.

Later, as she walked to and from my table to serve breakfast and to refill my coffee, I noticed a very slight gait and what looked like a knee brace on her left leg under her long skirt. I mentioned she looked tired, with her saying she had gotten off an 8PM shift the night before, went home and spent time with her babies before coming back to work for another shift. After one last coffee refill I asked her, "Are you wearing a knee brace because of an injury?"

She replied, "No. I wear a prosthetic as I lost my leg below the knee when I was three years old due to an issue when I was in surgery." I was somewhat surprised and struggled a bit for a response before just stating, "God Bless you."

When I left and headed back to the hotel, my thoughts turned to another conversation I had not far from Denny's with a gentleman at the corner of the Outback bar over dinner the night before. He provided advice from Stephen J. Dubner and Steven Levitt, authors of *Freakonomics*, that the decrease in crime that occurred after the 1960's was largely due to an increased availability of abortion to poor, unwed mothers.

As a Christian at the time, I was struggling with the abortion issue as I realized abortion is against God's will, but at the same time realize that our society fails to have the safety nets in place for poor mothers and that those safety nets are dramatically disproportionate when it comes to minority populations. Yet, here was a hard-working young woman balancing taxing work and motherhood with a disability. She had found an alternative path to abortion despite her prosthetic leg and worked standing on that leg many extra hours to be a provider for her children as best she could. She was also fortunate to have family around her too. In time, my understanding on abortion evolved as referenced in *Choose Life AND Serving Those Most in Need*.

After I left, I found myself regretting that I had not tipped more than an amount that matched the cost of breakfast. My heart and soul felt refreshed in this experience. What an amazing example of being able to do the right thing despite your circumstances. This young lady, a hard-working Mom is truly blessed and surely a blessing to her family and children too.

August 20, 2016, and July 21, 2019

Family Summer Vacation 1999

The summer of 1999, we took our longest and most adventurous family vacation. The trip had parts of Chevy's Vacation, and parts adventure, fun and many unique experiences. Megan was 15, Katie was 11 and Chris was soon to be seven. We flew to Denver, where I rented a Ford Expedition with three rows of seats, with each of my kids taking turns in the front seat with Dad. My ex-wife was firmly planted in the middle row.

We covered 2,700 miles including many national parks from Bryce to Zion to the Grand Canyon to the Painted Desert to the Petrified Forest to Pike's Peak to Volcano Park to Meteor Park and many more. We white water rafted in Taos and spent two event filled days in Vegas. The trip had parts of Chevy's Vacation, parts adventure, fun and many unique experiences.

There was a scary ride up, and more so down Pikes Peak our first day out, as railings were missing in spots, and every station on the radio spoke of a truck that went over edge days before. This apprehension early on the trip for all of us made off road ventures near Grand Canyon and Sedona later seem like a breeze.

Other than Vegas at the MGM Grand, we only stayed at one other hotel for two nights, the Resident Inn in Flagstaff. The Cassidy family played many Basketball games with the Chinese National Swim team that was training there in the higher altitude at Northern Arizona State. Katie had an Olympic pen pal for a couple years after that.

At the Dairy Queen in Sedona there was a flea market with Indian jewelry, where I got an underground copy of directions for the Pink Jeep Tour, a touring company of Jeeps up to the Sedona peaks. We saved the fees and added to the adventure when dad drove up at sunset, quite a site of the hues of color up close and in the distance.

Leaving the Grand Canyon, Dad saw a short cut on the Rand McNally map, dirt roads that could save 75 miles diagonally (sort of) heading towards Vegas. We went about 30 miles to the first ranch with a cattle guard between the house and barn. Megan had to get out, letting us through. Thereafter, I went through some rough areas with luggage flying left and right.

The road then gradually got much worse until the next washed out dry steam bed, so I turned back to the southwest fork some 15 miles or more back. The road got better and after over 20 miles, including seeing a mountain lion and yes, a real roadrunner, we approached a second ranch. This time, there were many signs well beyond "no trespassing," like "we will shoot trespassers" and worse. I turned around and after almost 100 miles of dirt roads was back on the main road leading to Williams.

After visiting a Six Flags Park near Denver, we settled into a hotel not too far from the airport for the next day's flight. I prepared a list of places we visited and most things we had done. I printed that night and gave to everyone copies for the plane ride home to rank the places that were the most fun for them. They ranked their favorite places, which is summarized below:

	Dad	Chris	Katie	Megan
1. Bryce Canyon and hail	1.....			4
2. Grand Canyon.....	7.....	6.....		9
3. Zion and the view from the canyon floor	8.....			3
4. Whitewater on the Rio Grande, NM	2.....			1
5. Excalibur dinner show			2.....	9
6. Hiking to Indian Cliff Dwellings.....	4.....			4
7. Pikes Peak.....				5
8. Sedona off road		3	3	8
9. Off Road near Grand Canyon...beep, beep.....	9.....			1
10. Capital Reef Nation Park				
11. Horseback Riding on Bryce Rim			1.....	2
12. MGM Water and Amusement park & Hotel	5.....	10.....		3
and gambling				
13. Pedestrian Mall in Denver and Mongolian BBQ			6.....	
14. Six Flags, new coasters, and water park.....			7.....	7
15. Taos & Santa Fe & real Mexican food.....				9
16. Petrified Forest and Painted Desert			6.....	8
17. Bandura Volcano				
18. Meteor Park				4
19. The Ice Caves in NM.....				5
20. Historical RR trip in Co.....				10
21. Walk on The Strip, the NY, NY Coaster, NYC 'Skyline', Treasure Island				
22. Garden of the Gods				
23. Staying in AZ at Hotel and playing BBall			7.....	6
with Chinese National Swim Team.....				
24. Megan's silence contest so Katie and Chris were				10
good for many of 2,700 miles				
25. Dinner and shopping at downtown Grand Junction				
26. Hoover Dam at night				
27. Indian Reservations and jewelry/souvenirs				10
28. Rodeo.....			4	
29. Swimming... bunches of times			5.....	8
30. Kid throwing contest at Grants, NM hotel				
31. Dinosaurs.....			2	

When you look at the above list of places visited and the varied favorites, it is easy to conclude this was a trip that had something for everybody, provided long term memories for all. Dad even won over \$1,000 in Vegas in 30 minutes at blackjack but hasn't played since. *The Silence Game* is not on the list, but looking back is something that will always bring a big smile to my face.

1999 and edited/trimming July 2, 2023

Silence Game

Yes, lots of miles in between on the Family Summer Vacation 1999...and lots of tourist traps. Chris had begun collecting hat pins before the trip, mostly sports but now tourist destinations. Katie followed and Megan followed her and 25 or so hat pins each in 14 days resulted. Organizing and reorganizing those pins kept Chris busy in the car at times, but halfway Megan invented the “Silence Game” to stop Chris from teasing Katie and vice versa. Katie was still too sensitive to being teased, considering her being smart and regularly logical for her 11 years to let an often silly six-year-old boy get to her. Chris loved games even if the game was him keeping quiet and counting how long.

Chris was always expressive and/or demonstrative, the same first grader that trigger’s Katie’s best friend’s mom suggesting his Ritalin dose should be increased (he wasn’t on it or anything, just real talkative like I wonder who at times). The silence game progressed through Utah, as he slipped into words answering his sister’s purposeful efforts to trip him up with their questions. By the time we left the Dinosaur Museum in Grand Junction, he was a Silence Game pro. He wrote a note asking to stop to pee later and asked for a similar timeout in a note before Glenwood Springs. We continued through the Rockies with the girls debating roller coasters at Great Adventure in Denver the next day, telling him that he cannot go on certain rides and other teases to prompt his talking. He was steadfast.

Within an hour or more from Denver and still in the lower Rockies, we saw the sign for an antique train ride near Georgetown. We took the old train loop touching large pine tree limbs as we went by and he was still quiet, yet still his demonstrative self with those exaggerated expressions that continued until his early teens. Back at the main stop, we arrived at the proverbial gift shop and there were the hat pins. He pointed to the one he wanted while the girls debated. I bought the pins and handed them to each, with a “Here you go Chris,” for Chris.

“Thank you, Dad,” he said, forgetting the four-hour Silence Game record as the girls began to offer a tease or ribbing, but before the words came out, they immediately hesitated as they saw his tears and chimed in concurrently with “Aww, so cute” as they hugged him. Mom and Dad smiled proudly and concurrently.

“You’re welcome. And congrats on that Silence Game record, Chris. It will never be broken,” I told him. He was happy once again. We only had another full day of vacation, but the lack of silence was embraced by all as if there never was a Silence Game after all.

November 30, 2009

Twisters

The winds kept increasing after leaving suburban St. Louis as I headed west on I-44. By the time I got across most of Missouri and stopped in Springfield, the wind had doubled in speed and the clouds had me thinking of the movie Twister. I stopped for lunch and overheard a conversation that tornado warnings were out for parts of four states. My thoughts took me to the movie Twisters and my son, Chris. As a small child he watched basketball games and the movie

Twister repeatedly while he played with his figurines that included cows and cars flying in every direction around the den.

When I saw the sign for the city of Joplin, I recalled the devastating May 2011 tornado that hit Joplin, causing 161 deaths, over 1,550 injuries and \$2.8 billion dollars in damages, and now I was alarmed. Then there was an interruption on the radio that went something like this: “This is an emergency. This is not a test. There is a severe tornado warning for portions of northwest Arkansas and southeast Oklahoma. If you are in these areas, immediately seek underground shelter, leave mobile homes, get out of moving cars, and seek safety. Expect flying debris.”

The message went on to list the counties that were under immediate threat of devastation. Although I was at least 50 miles away, I felt an even higher level of alert. I continued to drive toward Tulsa and then called Chris and Katie. She reminded me her favorite movie was the Wizard of Oz as I realized it was Friday the 13th of April. Now, I felt yet a higher alert driving through smoke for an hour and a half due to wildfires in and around Oklahoma City. By the time I got to my hotel in Ardmore, I felt I had experienced the potential of God’s wrath here on earth.

The next morning, I went down to the continental breakfast and had a brief conversation with a gentleman. I told him, “I’m from NJ and I heard a tornado warning for the first time in my life. I guess that’s a regular occurrence for you?”

“Oh, yes. We get warnings all the time. I’ve been close to a lot of twisters over the years. Have you ever seen the movie Twister?”

I replied, “I sure have!” and then continued with the story of my son’s fascination during childhood.

He responded, “I live in Kansas. My house was one of several they blew up as part making the movie. They did build me a new house which I live in today.”

Heading to Texas thereafter on a sunny day with lessened anxiety, I found myself smiling and visualizing toys flying in the air in our den years ago.

June 13, 2018, from a trip two months before.

Paul (and Tim) Used Scribes

As stated in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me.” This is very true for me. With my bad neck and shoulder that limits typing too much and with speaking technology too flawed for my speaking, I use dictation (DVR) for much of my personal and professional writing. The Bible has many examples of God’s disciples that understood their limitations yet achieved more than many others. Moses felt limited by his ability to speak. Jeremiah felt as if he was just a child. Paul had a thorn in his flesh and admitted he was weak and trembling.

On the web site Bible.org under “Leader Qualifications,” the topic starts with “Timothy stands out in Scripture as a stereotypical misfit for a leadership position.” From what we know about him, he was timid, a bit sickly, and a bit reticent to do the work he had been called to do. Nonetheless, when Paul wrote to this young man, his letters reflected the heart of a mentor who perceived his protégé’s leadership potential despite the younger man’s naturally timid disposition (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul regarded him as “my true son in faith. (1 Timothy 1:2) as this young man overcame his natural limitations to become one of the early church’s most significant leaders. Timothy’s leadership qualities (Philippians 2:19-22) far outweighed the limitations of his physical presence. These passages and the interpretation may be coincidental, but I think not.

Paul wrote to Timothy often, but Paul’s writings were most certainly done using scribes as Paul had his limitations. The Book of Romans closes with “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.” Therefore, the person who literally wrote the Book of Romans was Tertius in Paul’s words. In many of his letters, Paul wrote a greeting by prefacing it was in his own hand (Corinthians 16:21 and Colossians 4:18). This implied an added importance as it further confirmed that most of Paul’s writings were done through scribes.

In the 80’s and 90’s my business was very much built through secretarial support using old-fashioned stenography. Almost a decade back, I discovered DVR dictation and the ability to attach and send MP3 files on a computer, a great Blessing that provides to be able to write and therefore reach more people. As the Bible suggests with Tertius, scribes can have great importance to get worthy messages out. I pray and part of me expects, (the confident yet humble part), that in small ways I am following Paul’s example in being able to get the word out with the assistance of others.

We have free will and choices, and that includes seeking help from like-minded and talented people from scribes to teams and extended teams in good works.

September 3, 2016, June 9 and 29th, 2019

Basketball Dinner and When Boys Cry

My son Chris had a great senior season before the annual High School Basketball Dinner. Chris and the other senior starter Kyle (who had played ball together since 3rd grade) were Co-MVP. Kyle is a unique hard-working kid going to John Hopkins to study medicine. When it was over, Chris left the dinner with him to share a (hopefully soda) toast.

I never much liked the head coach, and he never liked me telling him he wasn’t treating my son and others equally, but I liked him a lot tonight. He is a tough guy, way too hard on the kids. He plays favorites, sometimes to the extreme. He consistently yells at some kids more than others, and you could win an academy award and still not act like you seemingly hate someone more than when he yells at some kids two inches from their face. He does teach how important team play is, and the kids did play better as a team with two exceptions the first half of the year, one who happened to be his sophomore God Son and the other being Kyle.

You respected Kyle for his hard work, yet don't in his lack of humbleness that Chris had in groves. Yet, Kyle became a good teammate as the year played out and the team came so close to that elusive championship. Kyle was co-MVP because he worked hard for years, while Chris didn't work too hard for regular stretches (as the coach reminded him this night in his speech). Nonetheless, Kyle deserved Co-MVP because he finally got it in another way. He became a good teammate.

The coach called Kyle up first, then Chris, and lastly a bench player, Chalmers as the last senior on the team, who was just the nicest and most respectful kid who got the team award as the best teammate. It was well deserved. The coach spoke about Kyle first, what you would expect of a hard worker heading to Johns Hopkins even though he had scholarship offers from somewhat bigger basketball schools. He wanted to be a doctor, and John Hopkins is as big as you get in that more important realm.

Then he spoke about Chris, and while he got his only audience laugh explaining how the coaching staff never knew what shot to expect, left, right, underhand or the out of bounds to Chris tap, he focused on what makes me so proud about Chris and has for so long, the fact he was an amazing and unique teammate. Even when things weren't going his way as a player as a junior, he was not different from anyone than when he was a star that was all county and all division as a senior. As the coach said, everyone liked Chris, and that was and is reflected in his encouraging and engaging everyone, being the great teammate.

After the coach spoke, each of the seniors spoke. None were compelling, yet to no surprise, Kyle was most prepared and had the most to thank when he spoke first. Chris spoke second, and while he was nervous and thanked all the right people, he ended with a "shout out" to Chalmers. When it was over, in between two bigger than expected for being in public hugs from Chris at that age, he asked if I had change of a ten. "Why Chris?" I asked with Bobby standing on his left "Bobby owes me \$5 and we need change." "Why?" I asked again. "He bet me I wouldn't give a shout out to Chalmers during my speech" he advised. Chris being Chris I thought as I held off chastising Chris or the junior Bobby on letting Chris set him up.

Chalmers was the only senior among the three not to first thank his parents in their speech. His parents were not there, his father likely still pouting over playing time. I felt sad for him. Everything the coach had to say in much detail was true about this great kid. His father didn't hear it, and I am not sure he would have felt a similar sense of pride to the one I felt in Chalmers. Before I left, I told him I was proud of him and why as I shook his hand.

At the end of day, and every day along the way, it wasn't about basketball, it was about what these kids learn, how they grow, how they mature. Part of that is being a great friend and a great teammate. I miss imparting that most from my times coaching for a handful of Chris's younger years and hope to get back to that.

In the last game, they were within an overtime game away from playing for the Central New Jersey Championship for large schools, almost overcoming a 0-13 shooting game from a sophomore, but they lost a seven-point lead in the last 45 seconds to then lose in overtime. At the awards dinner, the coach read parts of an article from a local sports blog (below) on that tough

overtime loss. They cried because of the togetherness combined with effort and had become a team like some kind of passage from boyhood to manhood.

Below is the news story of sorts about the game from “Why They Cry” on March 8, 2010, by All Shore Media.

I don't play team sports anymore. I'm at an age where I get my competitive juices flowing playing golf or maybe bowling or taking a long run. People tell me that it's great that I still play sports, that I'm still an athlete. The truth is I don't feel like an athlete anymore. Because to me being an athlete meant I was part of a team. I like playing golf and I like to run. But I loved being on a team.

Yesterday I watched a group of high school basketball players lose a game in overtime. I watched them literally scrape and claw through screens, dive on the floor for loose balls and generally give up their body just so their team would have a chance to win. At the end of the game, they were on the losing end, and they had just listened to their coach give his last speech of the year. He probably told them he was proud of them for getting this far. That all the hard work they had done was the reason they had tasted some measure of success.

If he was a smart coach, he thanked them for their efforts and probably got a little choked up doing it. I watched the boys walk out of the locker room and I saw a lot of red eyes. Those boys didn't cry because they missed jump shots or didn't get rebounds or got called for a foul. Those boys cried because they were part of a family, and that family was about to break up. They had trained together for months. Joked together, sweated together, absorbed pain together. They argued amongst themselves at times and sometimes they just didn't like each other very much. But the next day, like any family, they went about their business and worked together to achieve a common goal.

And then the moment comes when they take off the uniform for the last time and they realize it's all over. They cried because of the sudden finality of it all. For the seniors it's a jarring moment. Suddenly it occurs to them that this was a really great innocent time in their lives and it's over and they're not prepared for that. No athlete ever is. For me, the greatest thing about playing sports was the camaraderie of my teammates. Most of the kids who leave locker rooms this week will never play organized basketball again. Oh sure, they might play in a rec league somewhere. But they won't train together for months. They probably won't even have practices. For most it will never be the same.

Nothing can replace this brotherhood that develops without you even knowing it. The kid you hated during tryouts is now one of your best friends. That upperclassmen who used to push you around just patted you on the back and told you to shake it off. You put your arms around a kid you wouldn't have even sat next to three months ago. It's a bond that lasts a lifetime.

So, if your child happens to be one of those kids leaving a locker room this week with red eyes, understand why. And be grateful that he learned about teamwork, hard work and

trusting the guy next to him. Be grateful that he is young and healthy and that he cares so much. Most of all, just be proud of him and make sure he knows it.

May 2010 and July 21, 2019

Champion

When meeting David (or Mr. Robinson as they called him at his house”), I was there with Dave, my close friend since 13 who worked for a charity that I co-founded. David was signing 500 limited edition lithographs in his den. Our charity donated the original oil painting of him to his charity, and later about 50 lithographs. The house was in a gated community, yet there was an added gate for his cul-de-sac for four homes and another for his house. Now that’s security! He sat and signed (his name, a verse from the Bible and his #50) and we unpacked, passed, and repacked the lithos as fast as we could.

It began to get hot, so I looked up at the ceiling fan, which was high above my head, with a chain well beyond my reach without a serious jump and not 100% sure reachable at that. He looked at me looking at it, then walked over, and reached when he went on his toes...his room and his fan.

The signing took place around September of 1995, with the training camp for the next season approaching and rosters being tweaked. The year before, the Spurs had lost the Western Conference finals to the eventual champion Rockets, with Hakeem outplaying David by a fair amount. They were both great players, with Hakeem just a notch better in their prime and with a slight edge one on one. The morning before we met, we grabbed the local paper, and the headline was “Rodman says David has No Heart!” My friend Dave said to me, “Tim, you better not open your big mouth about this article at David’s house later!”

“I’ll be political about it,” I said as he shrugged a here you go kind of shrug. Can we say, “foot in mouth” because that was how I used to be? OK, I still can be that at times.

David was quite glum and quiet when we arrived and as the signing was going on. I gather he read the morning paper, and the fool inspired comment, and I kept quiet for almost an hour. Finally, I said, “I suspect a disrespectful player on the team last year may not be signed for the upcoming season.”

“You would be right,” he said.

I left it at that, and we chatted quite a bit for the next hour, David showing us his hidden multiple computer stations in the other room that he spent much time on, hearing how he liked San Antonio except for the scorpions that were not safe for “his little ones,” and how he spent much time in Colorado at his ranch with the kids. I later found out that meant the kids sponsored by his foundation for getaways, many from home state of Virginia.

The next morning, we grabbed another local paper at the airport, and the not surprising headline was, “Spurs will not re-sign the Worm.” Dennis then signed with the Bulls and helped MJ and Scottie win three more championships. David, the consummate gentleman, needed Tim Duncan

to get his championship, at least his NBA championship, as few players have given back to the community more than David, and that is the measure of a true champion.

2005

Dollar Bill and Team Ball

After an eight-inch growth spurt in one year before high school and moving to High Bridge NJ, the smallest High School in the State that did not have a football team, basketball became my main sport to play. I never had a hoop at home until the one nailed on the barn with that dirt-playing surface for 8th grade, the 1967-68 season I became a big fan of the New York Knicks.

When I first started watching, the Knicks had one the early versions of the twin towers with Walt Bellamy and Willis Reed, but the team was becoming Willis and Clyde's team. That led to the trade with the Pistons that brought Dave DeBusschere to the Knicks for the 68-69 season. Dave was a critical missing piece to building a championship team. Clyde was drafted in 1967; the year Dollar Bill Bradley started his career after two years as a Rhodes Scholar. Dick Barnett was the fifth starter on that first championship team. He had that crazy leg kick when he shot his jump shot and was too often overlooked.

Bill Bradley had played at Princeton where he rewrote the record books averaging 30.1 points over three seasons. He was college player of the year his senior season and known as a smart player with a great shot from thousands of hours of practices. We always went out of the way to the shore in the summer driving through Princeton as Mom insisted it was a "shortcut" so Mom could take a picture of me on the steps of a university landmark she wanted me to attend. That was my only Princeton connection to Dollar Bill.

Dollar Bill shot from all over the perimeter but was best from the top of the key and from the corners. As a Knick, he would often catch that pass coming off the double screen set so often by Reed and DeBusschere and sometimes Lucas, and swish that top of the key jump shot. The Knicks became champions after the magic year of 1969 for the Jets and Mets. They were not the huge underdogs of their other New York counterparts, but they were still an underdog to the Lakers that had three of the top players of all time. Who could argue that Wilt the Stilt wasn't the most dominating player or Jerry West didn't have the sweetest jump shot, let alone that Elgin Baylor was the greatest power forward in the game.

The Knicks advantage was they played team ball at a higher level with great team defense and were incredibly unselfish. They were all so complimentary, DeBusschere and Reed banging inside, Bradley, Barnett and Cazzie hitting from outside, Frazier from wherever, and even Lucas from the rafters a couple years later. As a fan, I found it hard to root for any one player, so my favorites seemed to change from game to game. Bill was always on the move, with that sweet jump shot. He played small forward, just like me in my junior and senior years in High School. Heck, my own coach even ran a couple Knick's plays, one that got me the shot just like Bill.

Of course, Bill Bradley was different than a typical pro athlete, an Ivy League grad, a Rhodes Scholar and eventually a well-respected senator for the State of New Jersey for 18 years. The

first time I met him was in early 1989 in Trenton, New Jersey, our state's capital was at a Dunkin Donuts on the way out of town. Bill had just come from the inauguration of Jim Florio as Governor, and I had just come from a meeting at the Department of Corrections about a couple of halfway houses I was expecting to set up.

I was on the pay phone by the rest room when he walked by as his assistant ordered coffee. The place was empty except for a couple drunks working through the prior nights binge this mid-morning. I rushed off the pay phone to be ready to greet him when he finished his "business." "Where you at the inauguration," I began.

"Yes, I was, but couldn't stay long, I have work to get done," he advised.

"I want to thank you for all your efforts. I live at the shore, and really appreciate your shore walks and the support of environmental issues at the shore," I continued.

He acknowledged my support, and we chatted a bit more before I shifted the conversation to Basketball. "You know, I have been a fan of your politics *and* your days with the Knicks and Tigers. In High School, I played the small forward too and my coach used to run that play the Knicks ran for you where Willis and Dave would set that double pick at the side of the top of the key, you'd rub off it, catch and shoot from beyond the circle.

"We ran that a lot, didn't we," he asked.

"Yes, and so did we," I responded.

"So, did you hit the J like I did," he questioned.

"Actually, I did, but I couldn't hold a candle to you from the corners" I told him.

He laughed an instant, hearty laugh, and we continued the conversation a while. I left quite satisfied and passed by his two or three year old Buick Park Avenue on the way to my car, amazed at the mess inside with papers jammed everywhere, including the front and rear dash, piles and boxes of papers on the seats. It was obvious he read nonstop as his assistant drove, keeping up to speed on whatever, a brilliant human sponge of information.

I met him again leading up to the 1996 gubernatorial election when our eventual governor, Jim McGreevy, first ran for office and lost. It was at a fundraiser for the prospective governor, an open reception at a large hotel near New Brunswick. This was one of five or six similar functions where Mr. McGreevy and his select friends celebrated his birthday over cocktails and snacks at \$500 a ticket. Senator Bill was there, standing with the esteemed NY Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and two others he obviously knew well as they were laughing and smiling. I eased my way over to say hello. I started off with a pleasantry, and then mentioned our meeting years back after Mr. Florio's inauguration at a Trenton Dunkin' Donuts. He nodded an acknowledgement, as I continued "There was something I recall that amazed me, something about your car," I started.

My nonpolitical statement had caught the attention of a couple more of his cronies and now 6-7 people leaned into our group, ears straining over background noise as I continued “It was crammed with all that reading material. On the one hand I am amazed at the amount of reading and knowledge you digest, but on the other hand, your car was the messiest car I have ever seen in my life!”

To his left, his good older friend Senator Moynihan started laughing so hard that he doubled over and spit out a sip of his drink. A couple others laughed, as did Bill, with several others that did not know him as well standing there with mouths agape that someone would say such a thing. Bill, looking to his left as his friend tried to straighten from his belly laugh, still smiling and said, “We all can see very well what an observant individual you are.”

“I guess I am, Senator Bradley,” I offered. The conversation shifted and I just observed for a while until moving on into different circles. I recall as the next Presidential election neared that a poll of senators named him as the best presidential candidate, but his campaign fizzled. He was humble and didn’t have a big personality like the upstart Bill Clinton. He is and always was a man of principals, adverse to the compromises that favored big business and presidential campaigns. Our loss, as the world of politics doesn’t favor team ball.

Written December 14, 2003, June 2006 and April 19, 2020

The Mick

I became a Yankee fan when I was nine for the 1963 season. Mickey Mantle was already past his prime, but the lore and legend of Mantle was well established. Most believed that if Mick didn’t hurt his knee in 1951 and other later injuries, he would have challenged records for steals, let alone Ruth for Home Runs. I barely missed any games on WPIX TV from 1964 through 1967 with Joe Garagiola announcing regularly with the Phil Rizzuto (the Scooter) in 1964 and 1965. The Scooter spoke only of the Yankee Clipper in more revered tones than Mick. He could not mention Yogi without laughing.

I attended several games during the 1965 season with my good friend Walter. They allowed large banners then, even full-sized bed sheets like the one we had that summer day. They allowed you to walk around with it in the stadium as long as you kept moving. I always had a strange sense of humor, including the idea for a banner that said, “Joe Gariagola wears a Hairpiece.” The full head of haired Scooter loved teasing Joe G. about his hair or more so the almost absolute lack of it, so we figured at least the Scooter would enjoy the banner. He did, getting us on TV repeatedly according to friends, busting on Joe on the radio too, which we listened to on our transistor radio during the game during the three innings they were on radio as announcers went back and forth often at the time.

During the 7th inning stretch, Phil asked a security guard to come get us and bring us to the booth for a postgame radio interview at the end of the game. Mick hit a tape measure home run that bright summer day, so we shared the postgame interview with our hero. We didn’t have much to say when asked; just smiled as the Scooter continued razing on Joe for his lack of hair.

During the winter of 1988-89, almost 24 years later, I met Mick again. The evening started out at the Baseball Writers Annual dinner at the New York Sheraton where every major Baseball award was awarded, with the Cy Young and Rookie of Year awards the exceptions at the time. Dave, his one-year younger brother Dick, Dick's best friend Jimmy and I went all out, with Tuxedos and a couple nice rooms at the Marriott Marquis, as we had no intentions of driving after drinking. I had not seen Jimmy in 16 years, who was a bigger fan of the Yankees and Mick than I was.

It was a huge event of a few thousand people, a who's who of baseball on the dais giving the awards and in the audience. The Mick was on the end next to Whitey. It was almost three hours before Whitey presented Mick with the Toast of the Town to cap the evening. Mick was already quite buzzed and in rare form and was quite funny, busting on everyone on the dais. He concluded, "I want all of you to promise to come down to my place on Central Park south, Mickey Mantle's Restaurant and have a night cap." Many fans, players, coaches, writers, and others accepted his invitation.

Many from the awards show were at Mickey Mantle's place later that night. After a short while, Mickey sat at a table in the rear of this elongated restaurant and started signing autographs. The line got long quickly. I got in line, but not before betting Jimmy shots of Berenzen for the night for all four of us that Mick will ask me to sit down with him. When I got up to the Mick, I had nothing for him to sign, forcing him to look up to me and say, "What do you want me to sign, kid?"

I responded, "Mick, I got your autograph when I was eleven up in the booth with the Scooter and Joe G. Do you remember the banner that said, "Joe Garagiola wears a Hairpiece," I asked.

"That was you...have a seat kid," as the lengthy line stopped dead. After laughs as he recalled that night, he spoke personally for a few minutes before a toast with me and then sending me to his agent, Greer Johnson. She gave me her business card with a color picture of Mick from his 1951 rookie Topps Card on one side.

As the evening progressed, we eventually got a table and a great table at that. It was on the upper tier, looking over the restaurant's lower tier with a splendid view of Mick's table in the rear and the who's who of baseball people that continued to pay their respects as the night continued. Since we were not driving, we were all consuming plenty of shots of apple snaps on Jimmy. Mick was surely keeping up in the rear.

The bathroom was just to the left below us, and people were passing by us on the way there, eye level as we sat above the lower tier. Mick got up to go to the bathroom and remembered me from our earlier conversation. He also saw Jimmy staring at him with his nose a couple inches from the Plexiglas. Mick headed straight at us and walked into the Plexiglas, spread eagled his body and mushed his face on the Plexiglas inches from Jimmy who was staring at him as he is approaching. Everyone in view burst out laughing as Mick froze in that position for a while as Jimmy's eyes become as wide as saucers.

Soon after, Dick and I had enough (or too much) to drink and returned to the hotel. In the AM we found out that after we left, Mick had invited them down to his table and they drank, partied, and listened to his stories long after closing time, with about a dozen others including the ex-manager, Dick Williams.

Postscript for the Mick: Later in life, Mick went public to tell his fans not to live a life of the alcoholic he was, a great concluding chapter of a New York icon.

June 2004, April 19, 2020 and July 17, 2023

The Unexplained and Supernatural Are God Given Too

In this book, I tried to cover as many important topics as possible from a biblical perspective, with many that didn't make the cut. Several like this topic were written and almost omitted as did not seem worthy or thought could distract or send a mixed message compared to more important messages. I am thankful for all interactions, including discussions on biblical topics. That includes Ashley, a new Christian friend, and a discussion we had on a few topics after her reading a late draft of my book. She reminded me that all things, including the unexplained and supernatural are God given. After much thought and prayer, I included this topic despite concerns that many readers will become a Doubting Thomas and that will lead to questioning far more important expressions.

Secondly, I strive for humbleness in Him in my expression. Just because I may be different in ways, including experiences that seem beyond coincidences that doesn't mean I am one iota of more special than anyone created by our Lord God. Please see some examples of the unexplained and supernatural in my life:

- When I was in my teens into my early 20's, I very often had what seemed like déjà vu. At 17, I saw my friend Jake staggering from four blocks away, it triggered a dream I had often that ended with a bloodied hand being raised in front of my face. I turned to a friend and said, "Call 911, as Jake cut his wrist when he punched a school window." That was true. Jake was OK, but maybe that would not have been the case if that 911 call hadn't been placed so quickly.
- I took tests for one semester at Rutgers where we guessed four hidden shapes that others were holding. When you do it a lot, usually 25% or so is typical. After many thousands of cards, I was at 47%. This testing and others got me to be more open to the seemingly unexplained possibilities but at 22, a series of three things happened in one evening during two college classes and at a pub thereafter that scared others and me. For the most part, I suppressed any so-called paranormal abilities thereafter.
- Prior to *our Family Summary Vacation 1999*, one of my company's two assistants Diane left with her family in their RV for their vacation. Much was planned for our family trip, but our first stop was random after we saw a sign for the Air Force Academy Gift Shop in Colorado Springs. While there, with head down on the rack of clothes, I reached for a sweatshirt in this large shop. Another hand that looked familiar reached for the same sweatshirt. I looked up and it was Diane some 2,000 miles from our mutual homes.

- In 2017, I took a flight to Tampa via Richmond, VA as had business in both cities. I had a meeting in Tampa with two stakeholders for what is now an operator of about 100 senior living facilities, David, and Tracee. They were the operator/manager of the facility in Knoxville mentioned in *Unbridled Joy*. On my connection from Richmond in the late PM, I sat next to an impeccably dressed gentleman. We did not speak until the plane's descent when he pulled out an elaborate cigar case. I asked if heading to Ybor City, an area of Tampa known for a hundred years of well-made Cuban cigars before the embargo. He said yes, and I advised that I was picking up two people in a hotel in that area in the AM. He asked what I did for work, with my advice that I worked in senior living development.
- "My wife's best friend is an executive in senior living based in Southern California," he stated, "Is her name Tracee or Collette," I asked. He looked at me in disbelief as he said Collette was his wife's best friend. I Then advised him I was meeting Tracee and David of the same company in the AM. When we met, I told them the story, with Tracee already aware as the gentleman from the plane called his wife who called Collette who called Tracee by 8:30AM that morning. David, who I knew better took it in stride, while Tracee was somewhat uneasy over the seeming impossibility.
- In 2012, I visited NY State for personal reasons, but made one business stop to mystery shop a retirement community near Utica that I missed when looking at others in the market. It was a Presbyterian community that had a main building with services and dining as well as ranch homes nearby. I parked a few homes away and walked to the main building, catching up to a man in his early 90's. He had a baseball cap on that prompted a baseball conversation. He took his cap off to wipe his brow, when I was surprised to see more blond than gray hair for his age.

A few days later, I met Pastor Seth early in the morning. He is so busy doing God's work, so I didn't meet with him often. Immediately, I looked at him and asked, "Do you by chance have a relative in a senior living facility outside of Utica." he answered slowly, "I do," and we soon discovered I had met his grandfather. He was somewhat uncomfortable with the coincidence, so I didn't know the family called his grandpa Uncle Jack until Pastor Stephanie mentioned it in an unrelated conversation a few years later. Ironically, I had an Uncle Jack I cherished too.
- After Hurricane Sandy, RCHP started a program lead by Harry to renovate homes virtually destroyed though flooding. Other reformed churches from New York to Michigan sent youth groups with adults on a regular basis to help, with church members asked to provide comforts for the volunteers. I love cooking and was able to provide food and cook for groups for a few years every so often.
- Around 2015, I was visiting my brother and his family in Hanford, CA. Ron, his wife Maggie and I went to their church, the Reformed Church of Hanford and stayed after church to break bread with two church members that were active in the youth programs and service. I returned to NJ and there was an email in my inbox with the groups coming to volunteer that summer. First on the list was a group coming all the way from California from the Hanford Reformed Church, led by the same two friends of my brother and sister-in-law who shared lunch with us only a week earlier. Cooking for that group seemed extra special the next week.

Sometimes we can see a direct connection in coincidences, like the last example, but sometimes we see no connection or purpose in Him at all. I questioned what these huge coincidences or others mean when searching for a biblical or God in my life perspective. I concluded that we usually do not know the Lord's intent or purpose in any event or interaction in our life. He has His reasons for all of us. His love and ways cannot always be explained. He is the ultimate, the consummate and truly supernatural.

He is with us and within us. Anything and everything are possible in Him and because of Him. That includes the unexplained and the supernatural.

July 2, 2023

Thanks...Giving 2002 and 2019

Preface

Thanks...Giving was written for Thanksgiving 2002 and as such, my holiday favorites were misplaced as before I was born again and failed to mention Easter. As to thanks and giving, Psalm 108:8 states "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind" which makes it clear that thanks are a gift. Colossians 3:17 expands on that connection with "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" Note that "whatever" is an inclusive word without exceptions.

Thanks...Giving (from 2002)

Thanksgiving is truly a great holiday, second only to Christmas. It is meaningful for varied reasons, especially being a special time for family, when family is more important. There are so many families that get together and "break bread" only on that day. Families are compelled to be together. For me, there is an extra family connection, as my son Chris was undoubtedly conceived early on Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving has two major components that we need to be reminded are such a big part of a meaningful life, thanks and giving. We virtually always have things to be thankful for, and we need to do so, even if briefly, every day. Many do so in prayer, others are in spiritual thought, and are thankful as they reflect on the day, or when they wake up and see the glorious sunshine. Too many others take for granted their truly valuable possessions, their health and happiness, except for this one day each year.

Giving should go hand in hand with thanks, as it does this holiday, since if you are thankful, and have reasons to give thanks, you should give back. There are many people in need, and so many do volunteer during this holiday, preparing or serving meals and others do so at Christmas as well. Still, too many need a holiday reminder to volunteer or give back. Giving feels good, no matter when, and can be more rewarding when it is spontaneous, and the recipients are least expecting.

Family, thanks and giving, what a great combination, a combination that should be more frequent. We should have some added holidays, with the same theme, maybe Welcoming Day, or Family Celebration Day, or even Giving Thanks Day, because holidays that bring out the best in what human beings are all about should not be limited to Thanksgiving, or Christmas.

Postscript (2019)

Nonetheless, as the Christian I became, I came to know Easter is the most holiday. While we must be thankful for every day or moment, there are several things for which I am most thankful. First, every day I thank the Lord for the health and happiness of my children and grandchildren. Secondly, and equally, I am thankful in every little way and occasionally bigger way that I have and can give and serve. Lastly, but just as importantly, I am thankful for the journey in my faith that has led me where I am now and where I am heading. Lastly, I hope and pray that I may forever be thankful in every day and be able to share that thankfulness with those around me.

Thanksgiving 2002 and 2019

Oh Lord, Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood

In my youth, I was mostly a Rock n' Roll guy that evolved in time to enjoying various genres including R&B, blues, jazz, reggae and more from many time periods as well. Over the last couple of years, I have discovered YouTube for music that I can listen to while working instead of changing the CD's. Yeah, old school!

The song Presence of the Lord by Blind Faith remains one of the favorite songs from my youth and has added importance today. Why was the one hit wonder, Spirit in the Sky, so popular after it debuted in December 1969 and during the following decades? The artist, Norman Greenbaum, was an Orthodox Jew yet the repeated chorus is "Gotta have a friend in Jesus, so you know that when you die, He's gonna recommend you to the Spirit in the Sky," namely God. While not common, there are more rock or pop songs with faith at their core than one may realize. From People Get Ready by the Impressions in 1965: "People, get ready. There's a train a coming. You don't need a ticket. You just get on board. All you need is faith; to hear the diesels humming. Don't need no ticket; you just thank the Lord." The song was as high as #14 on the pop charts but seems to be longer lasting than so many bigger hits.

Perhaps the biggest crossover hit to rock or pop charts was Oh Happy Day by the Edwin Hawkins Singers, which peaked at #4 in 1968 a year before Spirit in the Sky was released. In 1970, a McCartney song, the Beatles "Let It Be" hit #1 with a Christian theme that included "When I find myself in times of trouble; Mother Mary comes to me; Speaking words of wisdom, let it be." Then there was My Sweet Lord by George Harrison that has been redone by many. In 1972, Jesus is Just Alright by the Doobie Brothers peaked at #35. The group had many big hits, but that song is the one that always got the crowd most fired up at their concerts. God finds ways to be at work, even if not intended as this group maintained.

As we got into the 80's, there were less crossover hits. Whitney Houston and CeCe Winans' song Count on Me was #8 on the pop charts, with the album becoming the #1 selling gospel album of all time. As Christian music and dedicated radio stations grew in popularity, crossover hits waned in the new millennium.

For me, a song and especially the chorus that I can't get out of my head is the Elvis Costello version of Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood. The chorus is "I'm just a soul whose intentions are good. Oh Lord please don't let me be misunderstood." While I always liked this song a lot, it has resonated over the last 5-10 years more as I express myself in the Lord.

When I look at topics that I wrote ten plus years ago or even more recently, few are worthy for inclusion in *Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, "What Would Jesus Do?")* Even most faith-centered topics that were written just a few years ago have needed a substantial rewrite or edit to feel sufficiently worthy for inclusion in the book. Have I been *Studying the Word* sufficiently? Are my expressions appropriately humble and worthy? On these questions and others, I lament and pray, *Oh Lord Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*.

April 22nd and 26th, 2020

Prayers

Prayer for Capacity

Lord, I know that all paths and opportunities in each day and moment are granted by You. My daily prayers include thankfulness for every opportunity to serve directly and indirectly, and for the health and happiness of my family. For years I prayed every day for new opportunities to serve and I will continue to ask that of you, Lord. I will try to regularly be thankful for the many opportunities you have granted me in so many places and ways.

Lord, thank you for surrounding me with so many talented professionals: landowners, city planners, my friend and architect, partners, engineers, healthcare providers, managers and many more. Many of them see my heart in You through transparency in my communication and belief in my pursuits thanks to my pursuit of You. I humbly thank you for arming me with a smart, logical, and creative brain with the capability to improve my organizational, planning and communication skills. Thank you for "wiring" me in different ways than others as you do for all of us. Thank you for increasing the patience needed for the many opportunities you have placed before me, for my awareness that at my older age I have less time and am still far too impatient.

Lord, thank you for opportunities for the projects in Denver, Dallas, Kansas City and New York. Thank you for allowing me to educate others as I did years ago on how to provide healthcare screenings, Lifelong Learning programs and intergenerational programs for senior residents now with fresh new approaches. Thank you for allowing me to find ways to bring churches and people together to serve those most in need. Allow me the focus and capacities to continue. Please allow me to continue to build and be part of teams and utilize the skills,

abilities, and more increasing wisdom you have granted me to my fullest capabilities and capacity.

Amen

December 3, 2021, and February 7-12, 2023

A Prayer for Thoughts of Others Before Self

I seek You, a God who understands everything about all things, including each of us and how we interact and communicate with those around us. All too often responses are rushed and done without much thought as to the intent or meaning in what is said. All too often we speak only from our perspective in an unintended form of selfishness. Time is not taken to think through a particular situation from all perspectives. Lord, may we be reminded that yours is the most important perspective in responding. In addition to your lens, we must remember that the selflessness you expect of us means we must put ourselves in the shoes of others whether we are comfortable or not.

I know my direct communication is sometimes perceived as unkind instead of in a positive and healing way. May I learn to be more patient in my life and my responses. Often, we don't listen or hear the words spoken by others. We are too busy listening to our own thoughts and all-too-often etched in stone perspectives. Lord, please hear my prayer for selflessness in life and communication as You expect of me. Allow my heart and soul to be fully anchored in You so that my words can help to teach, heal, and foster fellowship.

Amen.

Sunday, November 21, 2020. Edited February 7, 2023.

Lord, They Know Not What They Do

Lord, I seek your guidance now and regularly, but not enough. I try to think through and pray selflessly on decisions that affect others around me, from those I love to those I barely know. I try to put myself in their shoes, to understand what is fair and right from their position and align that understanding to what is righteous, measured by asking, "*What Would Jesus Do?*" I know no matter how I may feel wronged at times I must react with love, grace, and mercy, and if I cannot do so it is best to hold my tongue.

I am but a flawed human. While I am old enough to know better, or wiser in Your teachings at times, my responses may offer far too little grace and kindness. Instead, I get on a "high horse" and react in a way that can appear as scolding. Yes, I have grown but I am still a speck of dust in the knowledge and understanding of Your expectations. Yes, that means that my efforts at teaching are often interwoven with perceptions of preaching. Lord, while I know better (and prayerfully better still to come), grant me the wisdom to first understand Your word and actions before communicating or making decisions that affect others.

I pray for those I do not know or know well. Mostly Lord, I pray for those I love. Like me, they know not what they do at times. Sometimes we stray from what we know is Right and Righteous in You. Sometimes our actions are inadvertent and not evident to us, particularly in times of stress or anxiety.

Lord, I wrote this prayer this morning after interactions with others. One had my heart in a forlorn place as the day ended and my sleep was restless for much of the night. You were with me when I awakened at peace and ready to push through with the opportunities you have sent my way. I can (and must) dwell in doing or trying to do for others in Your name. I must limit my lamenting even though I need to be there and listen more to those around me whose anxieties lead them astray at times. Lord, they do not know what they do. You understand and know all of us. I pray for increased awareness in my seeing and seeking signs in others before their actions or mine go astray in You, to be your disciple in wondrous and creative ways.

Sometimes people need space, time to reconsider, to heal or realize what is right without prompting. May You guide me as to what may be the right time and place to react. Grant me selfless wisdom in You to know what is right and righteous for me in interactions with others.

Amen.

May 24, 2022. Edited February 7, 2023.

Prose and Poems

Him

We hear things from our pastors or teachers acting as preachers that inspire us. Millions have been so inspired by words like those that inspired me on Easter, beginning at 4AM when I awoke with a single idea centered on prose named Him. It does not seem unique to me, likely written almost identically by many others. That doesn't change the prayerful sentiment.

Him

All that believe radiate beauty from round to slim
Embrace Him

He delivers us from the worst when times are most dim
Worship Him

He is everything in the end, along the way and when you begin
Acknowledge Him

Within the influence of his graces, you always win
Hear Him

He will fill much more than your cup above the brim
Listen to Him

He asks and expects you to regularly look deeply within
Speak to Him

When your heart is open you will never be forsaken
Testify of Him

With Him, you gain greater understanding, your soul can awaken
Praise Him

April 24, 2011

I Am Thankful

In touching those around us in each sun-filled and rainy day,
I am Thankful.

Every day is filled with the beauty of His Blessings,
I am Thankful.

In every opportunity to be there for family and others,
I am Thankful.

We cherish the memories of loved ones that shaped us,
I am Thankful.

We strive to bring positive memories to our children,
I am Thankful.

In the moment that a loved one smiles or laughs,
I am Thankful.

In the past that brought us here, but more so in every today and tomorrow,
I am Thankful.

In true love, in allowing us to be centered in your love.
I am Thankful.

In your love, mercy, grace and forgiveness,
I am at peace, and I am Thankful.

I am at peace as my worries are few since the Lord's got my back. I live a predominately righteous and repentant life as well, so I am *Not God Fearing*. When centered in thankfulness as well as selflessness, we can grow and share in *Peace, Calm, Joy and Happiness*.

September 5-8, 2017, and March 21, 2021

Dare to Dream

Dreams and images emerge from our sleeping imagination
Born of fear, love, expectations, emotions, and aspirations

Then there are the dreams of goals fostered by personal beliefs
Some lead to self-fulfilling prophecies while in dreamland and awake.

Visualize yourself a winner by your definition in a place in time
And often enough, a winner you will be

Yes, dreams can be of a wild fancy, an unlikely wish or reunion
Yet, how many dreamers dreamed of winning the lottery...then did?

At one time visualizations are elusive, yet another seemingly so real
Lately they too often blur for me, not the crystal-clear images in the light of day

Perhaps a phase in my blip of my being, as I do dare to dream
All dreams, night and day, awake and at rest

I see myself in unknown places like I have been there before
Then at times, there I am, not a prophecy, only déjà vu

Scoffing and nay sayers are expected and welcome
We have freedom to believe or not...and to dream or not

I believe in God; that people are inherently good and seek positive change
These principals can turn all measure of dreams to layers of new truths

An open mind not to suppress possibilities turns them into probabilities
From probabilities to realities...when all dreams are not suppressed

Look within; see the realm of what could be
Like a wide-eyed child

Live a bigger life, embracing your potential
Like the baby in a manger, dare to dream

Written 2003, except the last two verses for Christmas Eve service at RCHP 2019

Hope

We must not let others, their lack of hope or attitudes of despair drag you down,
We must be positive, keep trying hard, keeping smiling and avoid that frown

Faith is an ingredient of hope, as needed as oregano and tomatoes in the sauce
Without faith, we would not have hope; we would feel such at a loss

Hope gives life a purpose, a reason for being, to take flight and soar, grow wings
The past is only a reminder, to learn, to remember fondly, do not repeat some things

Hope is something we require to look forward to a future worthwhile
We must persevere, and to get there, be sure to go that extra mile

February 2002

Lord Give Me Strength

Lord, give me the strength to never give up, to move forward, and to persevere
Yet always be open minded in all decisions that affect others

Lord, give me the fortitude to avoid negative influences and learn from bad experiences
Yet always interact with others with kindness and understanding

Lord, give me the will to improve as an individual, to be just and fair, and to help others
Yet, forgive me for my faults, my actions borne of emotion or others undue influence

Lord, give me the heart not to be selfish, and the vision to always think of the bigger picture
Yet, never lose sight of the needs of my friends, family and loved ones

September 2002

Fight the Fight

Don't listen to those who say it can't get done, don't take flight
Hang in there when you are pulled away, keep it tight

Face the hurdles, work hard, reach for that new height
When it's muddled or cloudy, look ahead, you'll see the light

There are those that will hope you fail, but you must never lose sight
When all seems dim, or maybe lost, soon it can all be bright

Perseverance will get you through the darkness, the sleepless night
Think and rethink all your options, you will do what is just, and right

Never give up, be strong willed, determined, and fight the fight
Reach deep down, ignore negativity, and summon all you're might

Early 2003

Ask Your God

Ask your God if the Almighty is a God of Love and Forgiveness
We cannot believe that He is a God that supports willful pain or vengeance

Ask your God to remind you that he has created an imperfect world
Full of beings with frailties including greed, ego and other traits to try to avoid

Ask you're God and yourself what are the lessons we must teach our children
Surely, he will answer that love endures any disapprovals of their actions

We cannot often love the choices of strangers or those once close and now but strange
Yet our God cannot be a God that teaches us hatred nor approves of related behavior

Ask your God what we must remember and cherish, and what should lay fallow in our mind
He will remind you only the best times for family and friends hold the most importance

Ask your God how to accept change and purge the past for the sake of loved ones
He will provide the paths of resolution, reconciliation and an objective truth for all

Ask your God if he is the God of all, and since he accepts repentance, shouldn't you as well
He will confirm once again that he is a God of forgiveness and believers must be too

Ask your God for the strength and fortitude to look within and know what is right in His eyes
He will provide the answers and healing will bring new happiness to all around you

December 21, 2007

You Must

You must speak to be heard
Be a voice of reason and compassion

You must look to see
Be a source of light and brightness

You must listen to hear
Offer a shoulder for someone troubled

You must touch to feel
Show sensitivity to concerns or desires

You must try to succeed
Effort will be rewarded and is rewarding

You must always learn
And teach others to pass a torch

You must give to receive
Giving is contagious, catch it

You must open your mind to obtain closure
The here and now, and tomorrow's rule

You must forgive to be forgiven
God embraces forgiveness in us

You must trust to be trusted
Yet believe in people as inherently good

You must love to be loved
Loving is living

You must pray to have your prayers answered
Selflessness must predominate

2011

When?

When will the time come for tranquility or peace?
Will men stop fighting, when will it cease?

When will good works overshadow men's greed?
Will they change the definition of succeed, maybe perform a good deed?

When will petty jealousy be ignored, and forgo the influence of egos?
And monies not become the measuring stick versus kindness or maybe prose?

When will we stop to question, and be prepared to accept answers?
Accept simple pleasures; yet pursue complex solutions, without fears?

When you go through it, when you go around it, when you go under it, go when you over it,
and yes, when you just do it, when you demand it, when you will it, when you expect it,
when you know it, when you envision it, when you understand it, and when your mind opens
to all the positive outcomes.

2002

Because That's Why

Why is so much that is could be easily being accomplished still so difficult?
Why do you have feelings, keep caring, when it feels like others never felt?

Why do seek clarity in life and goals, and other's actions can be just absurd?
Why do you ask repeatedly, and even louder, and are still at times hardly heard?

Why do you seek answers or solutions and get doubts or questioned as a result?
Why do you remain positive, when attempts to praise often result in an insult?

Why do you want to see new places, experiences, when others hardly ever leave?
Why do you seek the truth or resolution, when so many others seek to deceive?

Why do you keep going, maintain the effort, when life gets difficult to bear?
Why do you seek compassion or understanding when many around you just don't care?

Because life will be fun and entertaining if you maintain the right demeanor
Because enjoyment can result from love, families, friends, and nothing can be keener

Because you have obligations and responsibilities that you cannot deny
Because when you keep on working to the right end, there is value as you try

Because we must continue with our efforts to achieve, seek knowledge and to solve
Because there in influence and understanding that will result as you evolve

Because you are determined, and believe perseverance will reap the right reward
Because you look ahead, not back too often and seek higher guidance in the Lord

Because you have faith and hope in people's intentions, that goodness will win out
Because you believe in a higher being or spirituality, even if not devout

2002

Random Observations from All Over the Map

In 2006, I copyrighted this title and many things written as I thought it would a good title for a book one day. Most topics I wrote about then don't seem worthy anymore. The topics are still random, just that most written in the last ten years has been centered on my faith. The brief thoughts to follow are ordered from 2000 and progress through 2020 as my thoughts evolved.

Dishwashers are a great invention, until they substitute for cabinets and cupboards.

Falling Into the Bathroom - Ever push the restroom door open at a restaurant and someone has opened the door to exit from the inside a split second before? You fall in on him as he looks at you like a fool, yet he stills says "I'm sorry" as he slithers by. You are too flustered to say, "You opened the door first. What are you sorry for?" or "Just don't do it again."

Fine - Please; never answer another question with "Fine." It is never really fine when you say it's fine. Maybe I have known too many sarcastic people to believe anything is ever fine. If it is really fine, say it is wonderful or great, as fine is not even good and usually the opposite of fine.

Karaoke

Singing comes naturally for many. It is not likely that applies to me, but I hope that doesn't mean I sound unnatural.

After years of karaoke, I have achieved a higher level of mediocrity.

Singing keeps me humble.

The Prettiest Flowers Come from the Most Stinky Manure

Busy - I am busy, yet never a busy body. I am blessed to be busy, yet I am hopefully rarely too busy to respond in kind.

Your Call is Important to Us - Does it make you a bit crazy when you are holding on a call for a really long time, being told every 20-30 seconds, "Your call is important to us," when if that was true, someone would actually answer your call ten minutes before.

People Acting Like Robots - For dinosaurs like me that prefer calling for customer service versus doing my own service, it is frustrating and sad that so many are trained like robots that cannot take questions as not programmed as such.

Kicking Over the Milk Bucket - My mother had a saying about my father I heard often: "He was like a cow that gave a mess of milk, but then kicked the bucket over." Enough said.

Fortune Cookies - Over stretches of time for many years, I saved what I thought were the best sayings, including these:

- People are not persuaded by what we say but rather by what they understand.
- Good writing is clear thinking made visible.
- Human Rights: Know Them, Demand Them, Defend Them

Can be Both Highly Questionable but Still Not Out of the Question - When taking risks and chances to do for others, actions can seem like they are over the top or questionable to most, yet those same actions may be the right and righteous choice the Lord intends for us to take.

Over Analysis Paralysis - We must not over think, but pray, ponder and then be decisive.

Choices and Chosen - We all have choices and are chosen, even as far too many disenfranchised among us have less choices. We all have God given opportunities, but we must seize those opportunities by standing up for ourselves and others peacefully and persistently. When we embrace and act on our potential, we can be the chosen children of God.

Reconciliation Requires Repentance - For individuals or groups of people, we must repent to acknowledge wrongs to then be better, right, and righteous.

It's a Broken World, but for Some People, It's More Broken - The world is broken, maybe more than ever, or maybe just more visible to us. It is so much more broken for some than others, more for the poor more than the rich, for woman more than men and for people of color more than others. I pray for the collective will to fix the brokenness.

In the Present and Presence - Living in the moment and enjoying things like a simple blessing of nature like a flower or a loved one is how we should live every day and all day. With the Lord in our heart or the presence of God within us, we experience a more joyful life and therefore are connected to living in the moment. The present and His presence are always interconnected.

Crutches - We all have crutches or excuses, including things from our past that prevent us from walking or running to successes in love and life. As Benjamin Franklin said, "he that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else." Cast aside crutches to be able to use all your God-given capabilities.

Love More, Risk More and Give (of Self) More - On February 3, 2019, I listened to a sermon that mentioned a survey where centurions were asked what they would have done differently in their lives. Loving and giving as an answer is not a surprise, as can we ever love or give enough? Since I am a risk taker, I was pleasantly surprised so many also wished that they had risked more. We can do so much more good work when we take risks.

A Joke and Quotes from Others

Serving Penance – Frank, who sat next to me on Flight 197, told me about Joe who dies and floats up to be received by Saint Peter, who says, "Joe, you have been pretty good overall, a good father, a caring guy, but you have not been the most faithful husband. Therefore, your penance is one year back on earth, and you have to date the most undesirable women on the planet and shower her with love and affection."

Joe returns to earth and over the next year, he dates several women, with moles the size of eyes, disfigured, and much worse, without personality, humor, or intelligence. With a few weeks left in his penance, he sees Bill, a friend who recently passed away. Bill ran around so much more than he, but he is with a beautiful, well-dressed woman with no apparent faults, even a wonderful conversationalist with a beaming smile when Joe chats with her. Joe returns to St. Peter after the year and asks, "Bill was the worst philanderer. Why was he with a drop-dead gorgeous girl?"

St. Peter replies, “Joe, even beautiful women have to serve penance.”

Maya Angelou – I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

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

And so it is with you...we are in charge of our attitudes.

Gandhi – The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Martin Luther King Jr. – There are so many meaningful quotes many topics, particularly on justice and love. They include:

- Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude.
- Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
- Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.

PHOTO GALLERY



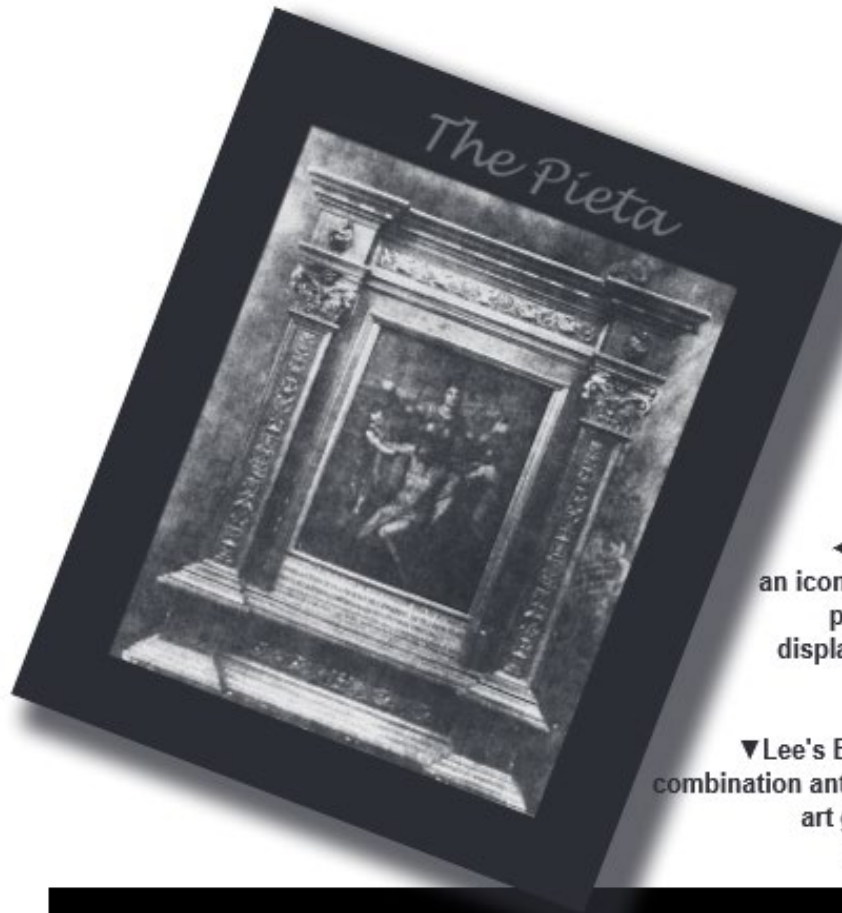
The front lawn and entrance to the Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey, to which Tim has been a member since 2012.



The sanctuary and worship area of the Reformed Church of Highland Park.



RCHP is referenced numerous times throughout the book.



◀ The Pieta,
an iconic painting
prominently
displayed at Lee
Bradley's.

▼ Lee's Bradley's, a
combination antique shop,
art gallery and
restaurant.



See accompanying chapter on page 117.

► Tim Cassidy's mother, known to many as Nana Lee, loved animals and they loved her.

▼ Tim's mother and father are shown at the Tavern on the Green.



See accompanying chapters on pages 120 and 122.

► In the summer of 1965, Tim and his friend Walter (shown at right) created this banner. See the full account in the chapter, "The Mick."



See accompanying chapter on page 155.

About Tim

Tim is a businessman and a born again Christian, a layman and not a Pastor. In testimony leading with *Personal and Professional Test*, and in his seemingly against-all-odds efforts in patient and caregiver advocacy in the healthcare industry that benefited so many, he was drawn closer to the Lord later in life. Tim then Studied the Word in a unique combination of ways on many dozens of topics, both from a biblical perspective and in how Jesus would see things in today's complex world.

Tim's career over many decades has included businesses from restaurants to retain to real estate renovations; from development, management and ownership of nursing homes, special care units, senior living and senior housing to advisory in green tech and renewable energy. His serving includes organizing a non profit in 1993 to provide free healthcare screenings, education/lifelong learning to seniors, and intergenerational programs.

Although Tim was not a church member until later in life, serving and doing for others was important before being Born Again in 2003. Tim's journey as a Christian has had many twists and turns. Important milestones in his religious and spiritual journey including patient and caregiver advocacy in California, as well as finding and joining the Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey in 2012. The Reformed Church is special in the extent that its congregation and affiliated non profits serve and draw others of all faiths to unite in serving those most in need through affordable housing, social service, healthcare, education, and many other services. As part of Studying the Word, Tim continued visiting other churches in his travels, which included 59 churches across 19 states before the pandemic.

Tim's upbringing had its challenges, as referenced in several short chapters including Alcoholism in the Family. He persevered, however, in no small measure due to his Mother's predominately positive attitude and love. In his family life today, Tim has three children, Megan, Katie and Chris; and five grands, Olivia, Audrey, Lucas, Clara and George. In the book, Tim hopes to reach people for the Lord's purposes to make a little better world for his family and as many others as possible.

AUTHOR'S MISSION AND PURPOSE

While Tim Cassidy's overall mission in life is to serve the Lord in as many ways as possible, his purpose for writing and publishing *Uniting Principles (Measured by Asking, What Would Jesus Do?)* is as follows:

- ▶ Bring people of faith or not together, i.e. unite in understanding and act as the Lord intends, namely loving all as brothers and sisters and showing kindness, grace, mercy, compassion and service in everyday life.
- ▶ In his challenging journey, Tim hopes to show to those who have fallen away from their Christian faith that all is possible in Him.
- ▶ Tim hopes to challenge good Christians to be great Christians in serving and giving beyond the norm.
- ▶ Tim hopes to inspire those of no faith or alternative faiths to understand (and act upon) core principles that we predominately share with all good people.



www.UnitingPrinciples.org



U.S. \$17.99 / Kindle \$9.99

All net proceeds of book sales will be donated to worthy causes, including but limited to Intergenerational Programs, and sponsorship and launch of www.ChurchesHelpingChurches.org and www.ChristianYouthServices.org.