

•Quotes are sometimes modified. Statements without attribution are either my own or sources I could not identify. References are to authors rather than giving additional bibliographic detail – not the purpose of the book to provide this detail.

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--You can't be spontaneous without a plan. Don't confuse chaos with spontaneity. Chaos is dissipated when I don't live life from one crisis to the next./ G. Jackson  
--"What do you want to be?" is the wrong question. It is better to ask, "Whenever I get where I end up, what will I see when I look back?"/ G. Jackson

### Outline/Purpose Issue

- Spiritual goals
- Intellectual goals
- Cultural goals
- Professional/homemaking goals
- Financial goals
- Physical goals
- Social goals

--G. Jackson/global purposes: (1) to know God and God's character for the reason of knowing God and His glory (Jer. 9:23-24); (2) to know myself in the light of God's character for the reason of humility (not comparing myself to others, but in meekness comparing myself to His character); (Ps. 139:23-24); (3) to see others in the light of God's character for the reason of service.

--G. Jackson/role purposes: (1) to love and serve my wife in such a way that she can live up to her full potential as a woman of God (Prov. 31:10-31); (2) to love my children in such a way that they know that mom and dad love God; to have them sense loyalty and fun in the family.

--Areas: evangelism, church, poor, children, parents, spouse, job, . . .

--Roles: child of God, husband, father, son, worker, . . .

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1. General affirmations: what do I want to be like (about 50; then combine and refine to about 35)
2. Scripture verse for each
3. Ultimate goals (relationships, great commission, image of God within).  
E.g., I want a life of \_\_\_\_\_. Focus on the pursuit of the image of God within.
4. Specific goals in each area
  - a. Turned into affirmations/goals
  - b. Also list of objectives

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--Be a man of the Word [read, study (topics, books), memorize, meditate; specifics in each].

- Be a man of prayer [daily, weekly, quarterly, annually, prayer list, partner].
- Be a man of faith [risks, giving].
- Maintain physical disciplines [eating, exercise, weight, sleep].
- Simplicity of life [slow down].
- Focus on fewer things with more quality.
- Turn life, expectations, and needs over to God.
- Contentment.
- A lifestyle of evangelism [pray for opportunities, people, sensitivity].
- Reading program.
- Control TV.
- Be teachable [humility].
- Repentance [lust, lover of money, pride, competition and strife].
- Be a servant [wife, kids, office, others].
- Dependence on God [health, provision, kids].
- Know and support wife more and appreciate her as gift from God [time off with her twice a month, plan weeks on Sunday, don't manipulate or reject verbally, discuss budget, pray together, help her get ahead on projects, gifts and cards, projects around the house].
- Raise kids so that they know we love God and love Him, know our value system, know they are dependent upon God, know they are of value [serve them spiritually, mentally, physically, socially].
- Help and love others; pray for them and serve them [prayer list, regular contacts, letters].
- Consistency in devotional life.
- Practicing the presence of God.
- Spontaneous times with God.
- Appreciate the creation.
- Wait before making decisions.

- Attitude of God as provider and source of money.
- See career as ministry.
- Willingness to accept limits, especially as I grow older; decreased capacity.
- Willingness to accept increasing responsibility as I grow older.
- Desire to complete the course without dropping out.
- Awareness of purpose.
- Continue to think.
- Think before speaking and acting.
- Building righteousness into people.
- Be grace oriented (His time, talent, energy) rather than works oriented (my time, talent, energy).
- Christ-centered rather than hierarchical or compartmental.
- Aware of tests that show me where I place my focus.
- Focus on God rather than how-tos and to-do lists.
- Focus hope on Christ, not self.
- Moving from function (doing) to substance (being).
- Stranger, alien, exile, pilgrim mentality rather than citizen of this world.
- Living with ambiguities rather than looking for answers.
- Supernatural dependent process rather than rational independent process.
- Freedom and grace with others rather than control and manipulation.
- Understanding joy rather than seeking happiness.
- Accepting tribulation rather than rejecting and avoiding and insulating myself from it.
- Time managed loosely to accomplish relationships rather than time managed tightly to accomplish objectives.
- Learn not to judge the value of my direction by my present circumstances.

- Pursue God's standards of success.
- Understand that my hope is in the character and promises of God.
- Develop a set of convictions for my business.
- Problem of double-mindedness. Learning how to give up a lie.
- Renewal of my mind (the world).
- Reckoning myself as dead to sin (the flesh).
- Resisting spiritual forces of wickedness (the devil).
- Do all things by faith.
- Remain conscious of God's presence.
- Forgiving others who trespass against me as I have been forgiven.
- Looking for opportunities to encourage others.
- Looking for opportunities to share Christ with others.
- Ministry opportunities.
- Evaluate gifts and skills, strengths and weaknesses (build on strengths rather than trying to strengthen weaknesses).
- Able to defend the faith in life and words.
- Look to God in the midst of trials and tribulations; changing and unchanging circumstances.
- Trust God in all situations.
- Look to God for physical and psychological needs to be met.
- Thankful in all things.
- Depend on God in all circumstances.
- Willingness to submit to God's will.
- Walk in the power of the Spirit.
- Not to allow myself to live a trivial life.
- Not getting caught up with doing to the exclusion of being.
- Not to insist on self-sufficiency.

- Not to seek to avoid or insulate myself from pain.
- Avoid drifting into complacency.
- Grow in understanding to the gentleness, compassion, kindness, goodness, and love of our Heavenly Father.
- Sensitive to my own sins and pitfalls; familiar with the nature of my flesh (1 Cor. 11:31-32).
- Walking in anticipation of what God has prepared for us (1 Cor. 2:9-10).
- Aware of the believer's judgment (1 Cor. 3) and motivated to build what will last.
- Willing to be disciplined by the Lord (Heb. 12:4-13).
- Not comparing myself with others but only with what the Word of God tells me I should be.
- Learning the secret of contentment (Phil. 4:11-12; Heb. 13:5).
- Not consumed by having; one who has learned that unrestricted satisfaction of all desires is not conducive to well-being.
- One who knows that whatever I have (health, energy, food, shelter, things, peace) has been given to me; I have received these gifts for the purpose of being a good steward in my unique context.
- A faithful steward of my time, talents, treasure.
- Not putting off joy until my circumstances improve; recognizing the difference between happiness (depends on circumstances) and joy (Hab. 3:17-19).
- Be a consistent responder to the nudges of God.
- Aware of the sacredness of each unrepeatable moment.
- Not a player of the "as soon as" game ("as soon as \_\_\_\_\_, then I'll \_\_\_\_\_").
- Not a player of the "if only" game.
- A discerner of the difference between the urgent and the important, and acting on it.
- Aware of the purposes behind affliction (test and builder of character, teaches dependence on God, benefits others).

- Looking to God for the grace to go on in the midst of unchanging circumstances (2 Cor. 12:7-9).
- Aware of how self-pity robs my strength, vitality, and time.
- Aware that life is difficult, and not expecting it to be easy.
- Not characterized by worry or anxiety, but an attitude of settled trust.
- An acceptor of God's process of transforming me into the image of His Son.
- Seeking first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33) and losing my life for His sake (Matt. 10:38-39).
- Loving others by preferring their good rather than fighting for my own rights (Rom. 15:1-4; Gal. 6:1-5).
- Serving others in pain and in need (Matt. 25:34-36).
- Comforting others as I have been comforted (2 Cor. 1:3-11).
- Anticipation of heaven (Rom. 8:17-25; Rev. 7:16-17).
- Concern for personal revival; holiness.
- Turning away from materialism, ease, and luxury into single-minded devotion and service.
- A risk-taker rather than fleeing into the hedonism of safety.
- Praying for the shaking of institutions of society. Wanting to see Christianity reclaim lost territory; meeting needs of the whole man.
- Feeding myself on the vertical and multiplying on the horizontal.
- Buy into a process that from start to finish belongs to God and is orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.
- A personal commitment to excellence.
- A disciple-maker. Building Christ and the Word into the lives of others.
- Must test my assumptions regularly. Rethink my convictions and my response to them.
- Development of a winsome lifestyle unselfishly directed to the purpose of giving away the faith.
- Knowing that where prayer focuses, power falls.

--People need to see me as one who can help them become what they know they ought to be. Cultivate other people's vision.

--What will I have to see in order to be able to say that I'm satisfied with life?

--Not looking behind me.

--It is not a tragedy to die for something you believe in , but it is a tragedy to find at the end of your life that what you believed in betrayed you (Joan of Arc).

--Sensitive to the process of responding to what God is doing in my life; more critical than the product.

--Not a conformity to prevailing standards of holiness but a step-by-step response to the working of God in my life.

--Resisting the prodding of God in an area of your life is a more serious grievance to the heart of God than the kinds of sin most Christians think about.

--Asa a good study of a man whose first half was godly and who turned away from God in the last half. He refused to trust God but trusted instead in his physician.

--Being rich toward God: giving your life in exchange for the things He declares to be important.

--The ultimate good in life is to treat things according to their true value (Jonathan Edwards). God is first in the area of value. Love is always a response to value. The heart always provides for what it values. Must treat God according to His true value, then myself and others in the same way.

--Not satisfied with mediocrity; staying on a cutting, growing edge.

--Avoid erosion in the aesthetics of the spirit.

--An artist needs three things: an eye to see, a heart to feel, a hand to perform (John Ruskin).

--Discovering the principle of appropriating God's promises in my hour of need.

--Several angles to the spiritual life: lordship of Christ; abiding in Christ; doing His commandments; appropriating the love, wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit; reckoning oneself not only dead to sin, but alive to God;

spending time in His presence (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6) beholding the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ.

--Availability.

--Growing knowledge of God and His Word; knowing the Word with the purpose of doing it; learning with a view to obedient action.

--Openness and sharing secrets with Him.

--Developing spiritual gifts.

--An encourager.

--Obedience first, emotions secondary. Obedience brings its own reward. There will be dry as well as warm times with God.

--The Lord's face should be the first face you see in the morning. Commit yourself and your day to Him to walk in obedience.

--God responds to every response man makes to Him. Isa. 64:8; God in His sovereignty will never clash with His paternity. Cannot and must not challenge His ways.

--After prayerfully and thoughtfully making a decision, don't dig up in unbelief what you have sown in faith.

--Your spiritual life is the soil out of which everything else grows.

--You can unknow spiritual truth as well as know it. Must continue to respond to the light you are given.

--The cleanness of the heart secures the clearness of the vision.

--Be a sensitive observer of my environment; people, creation.

--Practicing the skill of listening.

--Learning to look for the humor of life.

--Developing an eternal perspective.

--Understanding more of my resources in Christ.

--Admitting my mistakes and learning from them.

--Focusing on and serving others; an agent in meeting their needs.

--Not letting myself get nibbled to death by minnows.

- Develop myself as a person and never stop evaluating my strengths, weaknesses, and what I need to change.
- Need to pursue a higher set of standards than people look for.
- Need a few trusted friends who will tell me what I need to hear.
- Give more than you expect to get.
- Ministry, not manipulation.
- Don't minister for the strokes you get; that's walking by sight rather than by faith.
- Trust God for all results of ministry.
- Don't tolerate personal immorality.
- Plugged into reality; avoiding what is phony.
- Being a student of two worlds; need to know culture to be able to relate the biblical world to today. Difficult to be both contemporary and biblical.
- Care for body. Problem of combination of overeating and underexercising. Need lifetime commitment to a proper physical exercise program.
- A called, not a driven lifestyle.
- Focus on being rather than doing.
- Need to be an intellectual self-starter. Continued intellectual growth. Continue to be a student. Problem of hardening of the categories.
- An active rather than a passive spectator lifestyle.
- Pursuit of quality relationships. Difference between acquaintances and friends.
- Don't want to dispense answers that work for others but not for myself.
- Avoid competitive posture.
- Avoid comparisons with others. Only with Christ.
- Avoid criticism of others.
- Avoid unrealistic expectations and goals.
- To fail to learn from our problems (evaluation) is to repeat the same experiences over and over again.

- Learn that God's grace is sufficient for you.
- Priorities are not successive; they are simultaneous. Christ central, not first; not a list but a life.
- A clear sense of objectives. What do I want? Your objectives determine your outcome; achieve that for which you aim. (Hendricks) Few people are really fulfilled.
- A clear sense of priorities. What price am I willing to pay? What do you think it will take to make you a man of God?
- A clear sense of schedule. What means will I use? This will reflect what you really want. A schedule is a tool to help you get where you want to go.
- A clear sense of discipline. What dynamic will I pursue?
- What it means to be under the control of the Spirit.
- Say no to something every day just to keep in the habit.
- Moderation in all things. Sex life, thought life, money, time, etc. Control in all areas of life.
- The Christian life is a life of tension. Not what I was but not what I will be. In this world but not of the world.
- Commitment to a ministry of multiplication in the lives of people.
- Believing God in proportion to who I know He is. Filling my mind with the greatness of God.
- Communicating to others on intellectual, emotional, and volitional levels.
- Attitude of expectancy.
- Attitude of enthusiasm.
- Attitude of confidence in God.
- Attitude of wonder and sense of freshness.
- Spending time with non-Christians.
- Never get over the fact that God can use you; only reason you are being used is because God's hand is on you; don't put yourself in a position where He withdraws His hand from you.

- Study in Word with wife; pick a book and study it with a view to application.
- Take regular walks with wife.
- Use resources and love God; not loving resources and using God; avoid love of money. 1 Timothy 6:5ff
- Mark 4:19/the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.
- Money is either a tool or an idol. 1 Timothy 6:17 Spiritual investment of what God has given to you.
- Money cuts deep into character; the greatest barometer of the spiritual life; where a man's treasure is, there his heart is.
- Need to be on a growing edge at all times.
- Special times alone with each child.
- Dinner two times each month with wife.
- Schedule semiannual retreats to be alone with wife.
- Schedule semiannual retreats to be alone with God.
- Looking for fresh bread from the Word every day.
- Willfully choosing to acknowledge the deep personal needs of your life and to be open to change.
- Commitment to time in prayer and in the Word each morning. A discipline.
- Whatever you try to lay claim of is not yours; if I want to have something, I need to give it away; put your hook in it and you lose it.
- Enjoy what God has given you, but don't find your joy there; find your joy in the Lord. Materialism is very subtle.
- If you're willing to trust God for your eternal destiny, why not with the day-to-day?
- Thank God when He meets your needs.
- Need a hungry heart and an open hand.
- Victorious Christian living in the midst of a Babylonian atmosphere. No compromises.

- Need biblical agenda and goals, not cultural (including Christian culture) goals. Otherwise setting yourself up for defeat.
- Faithfulness in the little things.
- Focus on creating godly disciples rather than going for the big numbers.
- The way you change a man is by changing his understanding of God.
- The principle of living by the grace of God; even more difficult than the principle of being saved by the grace of God. 2 Peter 3:18/ grow in grace.
- The proper response to the grace of God (Rom. 6:1).
- My relation with God should become so important that the trivia of this world pales in comparison.
- Valuing my relationship with the living God above all else. Job 2:3-6,10.
- Need to review God's promises or we will stop taking risks.
- Men hate the grace of God when God chooses to express it in ways that are a surprise to them. Jonah 4. Trying to define, control, and dispense God's grace.
- We cannot manipulate God by our obedience; He must respond in the terms of grace.
- We revert by instinct to checklist living.
- The cause of hell is in great danger when there is one believer who sees no tangible evidence of God but believes Him in spite of it.
- God makes distinguished servants out of people whose views are imprecise because He knows their hearts.
- The essence of legalism is manipulation of God.
- Giving and serving out of sacrifice, not abundance.
- The hope of God does not disappoint.
- Feed yourself on the vertical and give your life away on the horizontal.
- The hand of God is in our lives more than we think; His sovereignty always means a purpose for us. God's plan is not capricious. Esther 4:14.
- The Father imputes value to our work; otherwise nothing. 2 Cor. 3:5.
- A privilege to be cut in on the action.

- Two purposes: to know God and to make Him known.
- We grow only by taking risks. What are we giving our lives for?
- Not giving my life to mediocrity. The overcomer is impervious to a commitment to mediocrity. Daniel the model overcomer of the Bible. The overcomer lives in the midst of a temporal world with eternal values.
- A man of vision.
- What is visible is less important than what is invisible. 2 Cor. 4:17-18
- Investing in God's eternal work; our works quickly evaporate and are lost forever. But His works done through us last forever. Psalm 90:1-2,17
- A powerful biblical self-image. The byproduct of the gospel.
- Humility proceeding not from weakness but from strength. Not playing the game of one-upmanship.
- Only when we see who we really are will we be willing to take risks. Gal. 2:20
- Not intimidated by the forces and powers in this world. Acts 25:23; 26:29
- Seeing life from God's side. Catching up to God's perspective. Numbers 13:30-33; 14:7-9.
- The truth will make you free; John 8:32.
- Satan has no power to match the power in us.
- Every other religion bases acceptance on performance, merit, striving; only the New Testament offers a true basis of acceptance.
- God anticipates every need I will face; nothing lacking or overlooked.
- The Word of God provides an authoritative and accurate word in a time of confusion.
- My performance has nothing to do with my value.
- The mind is the battleground of the Christian life; "every thought into captivity"; also, Phil. 4:8.
- Most of our unhappiness comes from listening to ourselves rather than talking to ourselves. Depression is the distance between expectation and reality. Take the Word and talk to yourself with it.

- Must recognize the destructiveness of sin and also reckon myself dead to it; Romans 6.
- The will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect; Romans 12:2.
- God has committed unto us the message of reconciliation.
- Must restore a sense of discipleship and calling.
- Need dependence on the working of the Spirit.
- Awareness of how culture shapes me. Need to back off and get the picture.
- Awareness of my roles.
- Our prayer life is our greatest act of dependence; the lack of prayer is our greatest act of independence.
- Everyone has an agenda for your life; don't be distracted from the purpose to which God called you.
- Don't put your joy in what you are able to accomplish but in who God has made you; Luke 10:18.
- My identity and confidence should be in Christ alone; any other thing that I look to will be inadequate and let me down.
- Don't miss out on the purpose for which you were called; be obedient to God so that you don't miss out on the blessing; Esther 4:14.
- Seize the opportunities God places before you and look to Him for the victory.
- Need to regularly rethink relationship to God or vitality disappears.
- "The object of life is not prosperity but the maturing of the soul" (Solzinitzky).
- It is not so important what you do, but what a sovereign God chooses to do in your life.
- "When Christ calls, He bids a man come and die" (Bonhoeffer).
- God meets us in unexpected ways. Need to be open, sensitive. Stop, look, and listen.
- Must see your spiritual poverty; the prerequisite for healing.
- Must admit that without Christ, we will fail.

--"The doctrines of grace humble a man without degrading him and exalt a man without inflating him."

--Information does not change us; obedience to what you know is the key. The simplicity of loving Christ.

--Need to get to the reality of brotherhood, oneness, caring, compassion.

--God's secret plan--Christ in you; Col. 1:27.

--The gospel is not information about Christ; it is the person of Christ.

--Our purpose is to love Christ, not to do things for Christ. He is our identity.

--The things we do (Bible study, prayer, etc.) should be a byproduct of loving Christ; otherwise we can do them without loving Him.

--It all boils down to the heart; 1 Chron. 16:9. God reaches down and changes the heart.

--God does not think the way we think; Isa. 55.

--Allow Christ to remold your mind from within; Rom. 12:2.

--Make sure your everyday life is worthy of the gospel; Phil. 1:27. The relationships you develop, the decisions you make, the attitudes you have.

--To look to your job for fulfillment is idolatry.

--The greatest thing you can do for your mate is to love Christ; the greatest thing you can do for your children is to love your mate.

--Need to make a covenant to walk together with other likeminded believers. To protect and encourage one another; to stand together; take responsibility for each other; accountability relationship. Ask God for a small core of people and stick with them. The power of people knit together in the love of Christ.

--Make a friend, be a friend, win a friend for Christ.

--Love God completely (running the course is not easy; a hard discipline). Love self correctly (identity--who am I? a child of the King; dignity--what am I worth? Christ's death; security--how long will it last? eternal). Love others compassionately.

--All is vanity without eternity in perspective.

--Evaluate self with your head and others with your heart.

--If you want your neighbor to see what Christ can do for him, let him see what Christ has done for you.

--I want to be uncomfortable with my present level of sinning. How ruthless will I be with the sin in my life? Will I pass off what looks good on the outside? Danger of being lulled into a comfort zone. Called to a life of tension. Am I willing to go for broke?

--I want to show compassion to the people I've been praying about.

--Must be involved in the lives of people, and have something to offer them.

--Do my time commitments reflect my verbalized priorities?

--I don't want to reach a point in my life when my children invalidate my ministry.

--I don't want to shoot blanks by depending on natural abilities.

--The illusion that business is productivity, and we love the roar of the crowd.

--Are you going to live courageously or cautiously? Jeremiah 12:5. Jeremiah was the only sober man in an intoxicated generation.

--What are you taking to the ultimate show and tell? Everyone is trying to show off now. Building their big buildings, structuring their programs, weaving the tapestry of their lives. What will last for eternity?

--The more we are attracted to Christ, the less we are distracted by this world. Proverbs 23:26/ "Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways."

--Biblically literate, culturally relevant, evangelistically responsible.

--Balance between control and chaos.

--Daniel wasn't impressed with what I'm impressed with. Maintained a consistent walk in spite of outward circumstances. Several snapshots of a faithful man in an antagonistic environment. Never lost sight of the eternal.

--Psalm 92:14/ "They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green." What do you want at the end of your life? Only by walking in this realization now will it be possible when and if you are old.

--Bifocal vision. Thinking globally and acting locally. Without this vision, we are apt to drop out of the process. Know the fleeting nature of life and

the imminence of Christ's return. The only way suffering makes sense (James, 1 Peter, Paul).

--James 4:15/ "we shall live"--even our lives depend on His grace.

--2 Timothy 2:15/ Is the Lord well pleased? Is the work well done? Is the Word well used? Reflective questions.

--Luke 10:38-42/ Distractions that cause us to be double-minded.

--Know and love both God's Word and man.

--Retreat with wife. Dream, look at what dreams are realistic, prioritize them, and plan them in.

--God has a provision for unrighteousness but no provision for self-righteousness.

--We are saved by God's mercy, not by our merit; by Christ's dying, not our doing.

--To handle yourself use your head; to handle others use your heart.

--Hurry dissipates energy; worry constipates energy.

--When a person is at the height of his sin, he is at the low point of his options.

--Only the fear of God can deliver us from the fear of men.

--Your temper is one of your most valuable possessions--don't lose it.

--Give out of your need--love, money, acceptance.

--Under the Word, under authority, under discipline.

--Making money: knowing when enough is enough.

--Begin to work at the values level of your life. Program your mind, spend time with people who cherish the same values, and pursue love as a major characteristic of your life.

--Your significance in life should not be too tightly related to your job.

--Knowing how possessions and work relates to what is most important; God, people, self.

--Problem of forgetting what side of the grave we are on [e.g., Bibletown].

- I miss out on being a part of what God is doing when I don't obey. God will accomplish His purpose with or without me, but He offers me a piece of His action.
- Needing to adapt to others when evangelizing (1 Cor. 9), but must remain who you are. Getting rid of any part of your culture that is not serving God.
- Living with ambiguities in the power of the Spirit of God.
- Let God define the ministry, not me.
- Fundamental flaws, if they aren't dealt with, will eventually bring God's temporal discipline.
- The tragic error of measuring the compassion of God by circumstances.
- The test of my life is the degree to which I imitate Christ by the power of the Spirit, not by way of effort or struggle. My job is to be clean, open, and honest about the process.
- Awareness of brevity of time on earth. When you leave this planet you will never again have the privilege of sharing the gospel, serving the lost, feeding the poor. Enjoy the opportunity and privilege of representing Christ to the world.
- The love you give back to the Lord drives the opportunities you have.
- If I'm going to die, help me to die well; if I'm going to live, help me to live well.
- Don't let the usefulness of your skills get beyond your character development. Service that comes out of integrity, not out of giftedness.
- Glory, honor, power, and majesty belong to Jesus Christ; we must not pursue these things for ourselves.
- Ministry is not what you do but who you are.
- Self-pity and self-indulgence are great enemies.
- As you live on the cutting edge, you need an extra measure of strength to keep your focus.
- Believers may believe everything about God without really believing in Him.
- Parable of the talents/ God expects responsible actions, not knowledgeable excuses.

--The heart of God cares for the lost ones, the little ones, the lonely ones, the left out ones.

--God calls us to be more concerned with living, not timing.

--The importance of relationships; the things that are important in life are people.

--It is God who does the work; we are called simply to be obedient to Him.

--Don't want to have uncompleted relationships with other people in which there are regrets; need to be healed.

--What things would you attend to if you knew this was the last day of your life? Do them now.

--1 Peter 2:4ff/ Our calling; we must understand who we are, what we are worth, and where we are going.

--Three personal worth needs: love and acceptance (sought in the lust of the flesh [people] but fulfilled in the Father), significance and identity (sought in the lust of the eye [possessions] but fulfilled in the Son), competence and fulfillment (sought in the pride of life [position] but fulfilled in the Holy Spirit).

--Don't dwell so much on your need to belong that you forget who you belong to.

--God doesn't tell us what our purpose is without telling us our position in Christ.

--1 Peter 2:9/ Proclaim to those outside what has taken place inside.

--1 Peter 2:11/ If we are going to be effective, proclaiming people, we must first of all have inward discipline. This should spring not out of guilt but out of a loving response. Remember your citizenship; know who you are. Why do I work harder for my comfort than I do for my character? Because I forget my citizenship.

--Must value relationships. The world calls us to compare, control, consume, corrupt. What is my value system? What do I crave more than anything else? What do I dream dreams about? Is it consistent with my citizenship in heaven? There will always be a struggle in this area.

--1 Peter 2:11/ Fleshly lusts wage war against your soul. The need to resist sin.

--Don't spend so much time worrying about your possessions that you forget about people.

--I need to live life so that others will truly love God.

--Don't love life as if you will never leave but knowing that you will leave. Not what is passing but what is coming.

--Fear God, not suffering or circumstances.

--1 Peter 3:15/ We are called to sanctify Christ; to enshrine Him. I must set Him up as head; if not, He will not be Lord.

--1 Peter 3:15/ The non-Christian has no answer to the Christian who has hope in the face of suffering. Our witness has a greater impact in these times than in prosperity. A greater impact when you share your hope rather than your prosperity.

--If we understand our salvation, we have a hope; what we have you can't buy. The suffering will pass, but the significance remains.

--Roles of a Christian: You are an alien. It is crucial to go through life with an eternal perspective, realizing that you are a sojourner. You are a servant. Your goal is to serve Christ and to serve others. You are a steward. Your goal is to invest your time, talents, treasures in the pursuit of the Great Commission, and the image of God within. You are a witness. Your goal is to manifest the character and proclaim the name of Christ. You are an ambassador. You are to represent God's interests in your dealings with the world. You are a warrior. Your goal is to advance the Kingdom of God, doing battle with the forces of darkness. You are a subject. Your life is to be lived in worship, to the glory of your heavenly king. You are a master. You are to rule and to enjoy the fruit of heaven that is available here on earth. You are a child. You enter into the same love relationship with God as a child has with his father. (Anders)

--When believers are consistent, they are different from unbelievers in what they admire, in what they do, and in their awareness of what they can do. The Christian and non-Christian belong to two entirely different realms.

--The beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12/ "Blessed" describes aspects of the believer's inner condition. The believer is characterized not so much by what he does as by what he is.

--Matthew 5:3/ "Poor in spirit"--the opposite of spiritually self-sufficient. No power within myself to please God; utterly dependent on His grace.

--Matthew 5:4/ An anguish for sin. Need for self-examination and repentance.

--Matthew 5:5/ The meek or gentle are those who humble themselves before God in utter dependence on Him for forgiveness of sin, wisdom, and strength to move through a day effectively.

--A teachable spirit; ready to listen and learn from others.

--Willingness to leave everything--myself, my rights, my cause, my whole future--in the hands of God, and especially if I feel I am suffering unjustly.

--Matthew 5:6/ A keen appetite for, a deep craving for, a deep passion for righteousness. The goal of Christian growth is the achievement of righteousness. God calls us to be holy. A man who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness always puts himself in the way of getting it.

--The Christian gospel places all its primary emphasis upon being, rather than doing. The gospel puts a greater weight upon our attitude than upon our actions. A Christian is something before he does anything; and we have to be Christians before we can act as Christians.

--Matthew 5:7/ The one who truly realizes his position face to face with God is the one who must of necessity be merciful with respect to others. The believer stands on middle ground; he is to show mercy to others as it has been shown to him.

--Matthew 5:8/ The quality of singleness of heart, the honesty which has no hidden motive, no selfish interest, and is open to all things. Such single-minded individuals are free from the tyranny of a divided self, and do not try to serve God and the world at the same time.

--Matthew 5:9/ One who is at peace with God "the author of peace and lover of concord." Seeking to bring individuals into harmony with God (reconciliation) and with one another.

--Matthew 5:10-12/ We are not to be offensive or foolish, or unwise. We can never be like Christ without being entirely changed. To become like Him we have to become light; light always exposes darkness, and the darkness always hates the light. Because goodness rebukes the world's sinfulness, the world turns against them and even persecutes them. They uphold God's standards of truth, justice and purity, and refuse to compromise with paganism or bow the knee to the idols that men tend to erect as substitutes for God (2 Tim. 3:12).

--Matthew 8:8-9/ To have authority you must be under authority. All authority is derived. Must know what it is to take orders. Spiritual authority produces results that we alone cannot produce. Therefore abandon yourself to the Lord Jesus. Authority comes from Jesus alone (Luke 9:1-5).

- Luke 10:20/ Whether I succeed or fail, I am still joyful because my name is in the book of life. Is God enough for me, or do I need Him plus success?
- Luke 22:24-27/ Being a servant to others.
- The devil is only in charge of the world as defined by John: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.
- Nothing to fear in following Christ's leadership. You can trust that kind of authority. To the extent that we become like Jesus, we too become leaders who give people nothing to fear.
- If I bow before God, I will stand before Satan; if I stand before God (in arrogance), I will bow before Satan.
- God has so made the world that our search for love, beauty, and truth is really our search for Him.
- Everything that puts value before possessions is a movement toward the kingdom; everything that puts possessions before value is a movement away from the kingdom. Everything that seeks to help people, that sees time in the light of eternity, is movement towards the kingdom.
- All Christians are called to minister. Ministry issues out of mercy.
- Full-time paid ministry is no better or worse than unpaid ministry. Ministry is a response to vocation; God's call.
- Ministries are given by God. Gifts are not playthings in the nursery of the Christian life.
- A balance between Word and sacrament, evangelism and edification, prayer and activism.
- The most valuable experiences of life involve taking risks.
- Problem of being harried and driven by outside demands--being nibbled to death by ducks. Need to have regular time alone.
- Being open to new ideas rather than rejecting out of hand what seems strange.
- Need for deep and intimate relationships; a group of trusted, intimate friends.
- Need to care for a person for whatever he or she is rather than what I think they are or wish they would be. Dropping my expectations of what I

want him or her to be for me, dropping my desire to change this person to suit my needs.

## **PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT**

**My life purpose is to be a lover and servant of God and others.**

Three global purposes emerge from this personal mission statement:

**Global Purpose 1 (loving God completely): To know God and His character and grow into conformity with His Son in faith, hope, and love.**

**Global Purpose 2 (loving self correctly): To see myself in the light of God's character and grow in humility and obedience.**

**Global Purpose 3 (loving others compassionately): To see others in the light of God's character and grow in love and service.**

Seven role purposes emerge from global purpose 3:

**Role Purpose 1 (husband): To love and serve my wife in such a way that she is free to live up to her full potential as a woman of God.**

**Role Purpose 2 (father): To love and serve my daughter and son-in-law in such a way that they know that dad and mom know and love God.**

**Role Purpose 3 (son): To love and serve my mother and father in such a way that they know that they are honored and cherished.**

**Role Purpose 4 (friend): To love and serve my friends in a way that nurtures commitment, transparency, and vulnerability in relationships of mutual acceptance and esteem.**

**Role Purpose 5 (neighbor): To love and serve my neighbors in such a way that they want to know Christ (seekers) or grow in Him (believers).**

**Role Purpose 6 (minister): To love and serve unbelievers and believers in such a way that seekers are evangelized and Christians are edified.**

**Role Purpose 7 (publisher): To love and serve readers in a way that helps them manifest eternal values in a temporal arena by drawing them to intimacy with God and a better understanding of the culture in which they live.**

**Role Purpose 8 (citizen):**

## PERSONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

- *Faith*: a radical trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God. God is in control and has my best interests at heart.
- *Hope*: anchored in the promises of God.
- *Love*: a deepening love for God (mind, emotions, will, actions) based on growing intimacy with Him.
- The temporal versus the eternal—I must treat the temporal as temporal and the eternal as eternal by esteeming the invisible over the visible.
- More than anything else, a passion to know God.
- Compassion for the lost.
- Since I cannot live on yesterday's faith, I must be willing to take greater risks based on God's character and promises.
- A growing awareness of my profound need for grace in all things.
- A clearer understanding of the truth that my deepest needs are met in Christ, so that I am secure enough to serve others without manipulating relationships to get my needs met.
- Developing a spirit of humility, complete dependence, and teachability.
- A willingness to forgive others as Christ has forgiven me.
- Treating people with grace, dignity, and possibility.
- A stewardship mentality—increased awareness of God's ownership of all things and an attitude of contentment in all things.
- Commitment to ongoing exercise and renewal of spirit, soul, and body.
- Personal integrity—a congruence between the inside and the outside.
- Openness and honesty in relationships.
- Radical commitment to the Great Commandment.
- Radical commitment to the Great Commission.
- Standing firm in the spiritual warfare by submitting to God and resisting the lures of the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- Practicing Christ's presence in all things and doing everything to His glory.
- Accountability to godly men and a willingness to respond with humility to exhortation and rebuke so that I will not be enmeshed in self-deception.
- Maintaining an ongoing sense of childlike wonder and awe.
- Focusing on the process and not the product; genuine ministry flows out of being as an extension of who I am in Christ.
- Walking in the power of the Spirit and putting no confidence in the flesh.
- Being fully alive to the present and not living in the past or the future.
- Living each day as though it were my last, and treating relationships in the same way. Cultivating the mentality of a sojourner, pilgrim, stranger, and alien as I wait expectantly for my true home.
- Growing responsiveness and sensitivity to God's loving initiatives.
- An ongoing attitude of thanksgiving and joy that transcends my circumstances. A willingness to cling to God's character in the midst of life's pains and pleasures.
- Manifesting the fruit of the Spirit by abiding in Christ.

- A commitment to ongoing renewal of the mind so that I can grow in intimacy with God and not be seduced by the culture.
- An increased willingness to live out the truth that everything God asks me to do is for my ultimate good, and that everything He asks me to avoid is detrimental to my soul.
- An awareness that good and evil both increase at compound interest, and a corresponding desire to live in the light of Luke 16:10.
- A desire to give my life in exchange for the things God declares to be important; a willingness to define success by the standard of the Word (relational) and not by the standard of the world (functional).
- The pursuit of godly mentors who are farther along in the spiritual journey.
- An understanding that habits of holiness are sustained by discipline and dependence; unholy habits are sustained by default.
- I must be faithful to the process and let go of ownership of the results.
- A firm belief that since the ministry cannot be measured, I must be content with what God has given me and not compare my ministry with others.
- Asking God for the three faithful wounds of contrition, compassion, and longing after God.
- Continued and responsible cultivation of giftedness while at the same time depending less on knowledge and skills and more on the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Commitment to the centrality of Christ in all I am and do.

Trying to come to grips on a daily basis with what it means to seek first His kingdom. The problem of drifting back into complacency. To seek the kingdom is to seek the manifestation of the intimacy already accomplished in Christ. Both now and not yet. Bringing the Lord into the daily process of living.

Ask God to help you want what He wants and to love what He loves.

The Great Commandment is not a part-time commitment.

The tension of living in a temporal arena and being called to demonstrate our commitment to the eternal. The abundant life is pursuing the eternal.

Being motivated in the direction of the promises of God.

No promise of temporal gain by following Christ. Temporal things are given as a result of grace. Difference between the Old Testament and New Testament on this.

What you do as a Christian appreciably affects eternity.

Contentment because I'm convinced that the promises of God are valid, and I'm giving my life for them. His promises are an extension of His character.

The secular becomes spiritual if you are giving your life for the eternal; the spiritual becomes secular if you are giving your life for the temporal.

Hope in the Bible is concerned with the promises of God; hope in the world is concerned with the promises of the world. Don't hope for what God does not promise. Don't let it consume your life or motivate you. Don't make your joy dependent on it. We don't jettison the temporal; we just don't put our hope in it.

The Bible requires us to hold many things in tension.

Like Jacob, as long as we are on this earth we shall keep wrestling with the visible and the invisible, the earthly city and the heavenly city, the natural and the supernatural, the health of the body and the eternal salvation of the soul, the desire to live here below and the hope of going up above, the hunger for bread and the insatiable desire for heaven, the dream of enjoying the seasons of life and the knowledge of entering the one eternal season of the kingdom. — Carlo Carretto

God is in control; not the fickle finger of fate but the providential hand of the living God. Like Israel, we may struggle with God over what our best interests look like, but this does not alter His commitment to them.

In all our relationships in life, we perceive that we give more than we receive. But we must be committed to giving rather than grabbing.

When our standard of living is threatened, we throttle back from commitment and obedience. A false perception that the meeting of our needs was our responsibility. But in an ultimate sense, our destiny is shaped by no one else but God.

The real question is pragmatic, not theological; will we look to God or elsewhere for the meeting of our needs?

Everyone has an agenda for your life. Some are more overt. Who determines this agenda?

Jesus dealt with His weariness by getting alone with His Father. The lonely places, and the practice of solitude. We are schooled to hate silence. The beauty of solitude. But Jesus paid a price to do it. In the midst of pressure He prayerfully pondered His purpose. The pressure to lose sight of our unique calling. Solitude is not a place, but a condition of the soul.

Jesus clearly understood His mission and measured His use of time against that sense of mission. He also understood His own limits. Thirty years of relative obscurity and privacy for three years of important activity. He knew that time must be properly budgeted for the gathering of inner strength and resolve in order to compensate for one's weaknesses

when spiritual warfare begins. His private moments with the Father were a fixed item on His time budget. Must analyze opportunities in light of your purpose. Stick with what few things you do well. Need constant refocusing.

It is the characteristic of God to give—it is the characteristic of sin to take. We must be willing to cling to the goodness of God in the face of life's pain. In His goodness, He wants to be kind to us forever, he always acts for our benefit, and he is committed to our joy. Biblical pictures that illustrate God's goodness: shepherd/sheep, father/son, groom/bride. We sometimes view God as carrying out His plans at our expense. But if He cannot be trusted, there is no hope.

When God is glorified, we are satisfied, and the world around us is evangelized/edified.

There is greater pain in sin and disobedience than in faithfulness and righteousness. Everything He asks of us is for our good, and everything He asks us to avoid is to our harm. The sanity of holiness.

God's ultimate intention for man is to glorify Himself by demonstrating to the universe through man that He is who He says He is.

Temptation and deception relates to thinking God is trying to achieve His program at our expense.

We are inherently motivated to meet our needs. But we have been deceived into the world's thinking that our needs can be met in some place other than the hand of God. Needs for love and acceptance (security), significance and identity (who you are), and competence and fulfillment (what you do).

"Life is not a holiday, but an education. And the one eternal lesson for us all is how better we can love. . . . Do not quarrel therefore with your lot in life. Do not complain of its never ceasing cares, its petty environment, the vexations you have to stand, the small and sordid souls you have to live and work with. Above all, do not resent temptation; do not be perplexed because it seems to thicken round you more and more, and ceases neither for effort nor for agony nor for prayer. That is your practice." (Henry Drummond)

"You will give yourselves to many things, give yourself first to love. Hold things in their proportion. . . . You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love. . . . Everything else in all our lives is transitory." (Henry Drummond)

“Love transforms . . . ambition into aspiration, greed into gratitude, selfishness into service, getting into giving, demands into dedication.”  
(Mary Crawley)

“Worry is a misuse of the imagination; assuming responsibility that God never intended you to have.” (Mary Crawley)

“It is better not to live than not to love.” (Henry Drummond)

“The people who influence you are people who believe in you. . . . To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. For the respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost.” (Henry Drummond)

“Love covers all things . . . the self-restraint which refuses to make capital out of others’ faults; the charity which delights not in exposing the weakness of others, but ‘covereth all things’; the sincerity of purpose which endeavors to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared or calumny denounced.” (Henry Drummond)

Problem of unlearning spiritual truth. Like losing a skill. Need daily reinforcement.

If you cannot measure the work of God, you cannot measure success. Therefore, you must live with the ambiguity of not knowing. The natural human bent is to measure, create, and control. We are in the ballpark when we talk about faithfulness to opportunity, but in danger when we look at things in terms of productivity or results. (Henrichsen)

Even when we evaluate growth in another, we can never know the degree to which we had an impact in moving him in that direction.

Counsel is never better than the information on which it is based.

90% of the problem in discerning God’s will is overcoming our own will.

You can be too big for God to use, but you cannot be too small.

Knowledge is proud because it thinks it knows so much; wisdom is humble because it realizes it knows so little.

Jesus came not to free us from tribulation but to free us from the power of sin.

You don’t learn more about Christ until you start sharing what you do know. Then you discover what you don’t know and desire to learn as fast as you can.

Even a dead fish can go with the stream. It takes a strong, live believer to swim against the stream.

Reducing the Christian life to a set of techniques. Spending all the time in Col. 3-4 rather than 1-2.

You cannot have a regular intake of Scripture and not desire to be holy.

Our natural propensity is to be with the crowd rather than the Lord.

A person all wrapped up in himself is the world's smallest package.

We will not become men and women of God without the presence of solitude.

When you have nothing left but God, then you become aware for the first time that God is enough.

Lord, do what you want to me so that You can do what you want through me. (Jack Taylor)

There is no future in any job; the future lies in the person who holds the job.

If a man could have even half his wishes, he would double his trouble. (Ben Franklin)

Authority is a poor substitute for leadership. To be really effective, authority must be earned.

"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker. (Hellen Keller)

Only the fear of God can deliver us from the fear of men.

When God measures a man, He puts the tape around the heart, not the head.

Luck lies at the intersection of preparation and opportunity.

If you can't think of anything for which to give thanks, you have a poor memory.

Good will is achieved by many actions; it can be lost by one.

The narrower the mind, the broader the statement.

Whether on the road or in an argument, when you see red, it's time to stop.

The failure to realize God's sufficiency in my life. Problem of focus changing from Christ to my circumstances.

It is unrealistic to expect more than God's sufficiency. Cannot properly quantify expectations.

Desk motto: no reservations, no retreats, no regrets.

A person without accountability will always consider the commandments of God to be negotiable.

Loving people who are unlovable is a matter of perspective. What God has done for human beings gives them a dignity that nothing in this world can bestow. Love recognizes the dignity inherent in human beings, and with Christians it is doubly awesome. Serving people through the lens of the cross.

God is not accountable to me; I am accountable to Him.

"Imagine one selected day struck out of [your life], and think how different its course would have been. Pause, you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day." (Charles Dickens)

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. (C. S. Lewis)

It is easier to act one's way into a new way of thinking than to think one's way into a new way of acting. (Erich Fromm)

A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams. (John Barrymore)

The need to keep your mind and spirit alert; don't rest too long between times with God.

Life is difficult, but shared burdens are lighter.

Use Personal Affirmations re four temptations.

When God is glorified in our lives, we are satisfied and others are edified.

"The world expects of Christians that they will raise their voices so loudly and clearly and so formulate their protest that not even the simplest man can have the slightest doubt about what they are saying. We stand in need of folk who have determined to speak directly and unmistakably and come what may, to stand by what they have said." (Albert Camus)

Character is letting the mood pass.

It is always difficult to find time to do the things you should do because it is so easy to do the things you want to do.

The Lord is more desirous to talk to us than we are to talk to Him.

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 72-73)

“Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.” (Jim Elliott)

God waits on the other side of a temptation to compromise to reward those who walk in integrity.

The more we are willing to release earthly possessions, the more we will be willing to grasp eternal treasures.

If we are not satisfied with what we have, we will never be satisfied with what we want.

God has already given us everything we need for our present happiness.

Contentment is not found in having everything but in being satisfied with everything we have.

Most of us don't know exactly what we want, but we're certain we don't have it.

The danger of spending more time looking in the rear view mirror to check and compare ourselves to ourselves and others than looking where we are going. It only leads to pompous self-satisfaction if we compare well, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority if we do not. (Dick Keyes, *Beyond Identity*, 90)

Spiritual dissatisfaction lies at the root of most of our noblest accomplishments.

“Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for, because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything.” (Peter Marshall)

Any dead fish can float downstream.

Diagnostic questions: Who are you? What are you good at? How do you define success? What have you outgrown? What do you care deeply about? (Phil Hook)

Five things to seek: At peace with your past; in step with God; inner contentment; giving and receiving in relationships; a clearly defined purpose that affects your schedule. (Phil Hook)

When it's painful for you to criticize, you probably do it well; if you would get the slightest pleasure out of doing it, it's usually best to hold your tongue.

"Have you learned lessons only of those who admired you, and were tender with you, and stood aside for you? Have you not learned great lessons from those who rejected you, and braced themselves against you, or disputed the passage with you?" (Walt Whitman)

"Suppose someone invented an instrument, a convenient little talking tube which, say, could be heard over the whole land. . . . I wonder if the police would not forbid it, fearing that the whole country would become mentally deranged if it were used." (Soren Kierkegaard [1813-1855])

While people in our culture are reading the *Times*, we should be reading the eternities. . . . When ultimate ends disappear, only toys remain. (Peter Kreeft)

Do I have a biblical system of ethics, or is it shaped by my culture? Am I willing to pay the price to be totally Christian in all my relationships? Am I ready to minister to the needs of those affected by this shifting value system?

God has passed many men by in order to achieve His purposes.

"What is the greatest wonder?" "Each day death strikes, and we live as though were immortal. This is the greatest wonder." (The Mahabarata)

God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things so that He and not the people receive the glory.

Our ministry is successful in God's sight to the degree that we decrease and Jesus increases.

A functioning disciple is a product of a multiplicity of influential lives.

The work of God cannot be measured or controlled; we can only participate in it. (Walt Henrichsen)

We cannot control most of our lives, but most of us don't admit it. The only thing we can decide is our response to the things we don't decide.

We cannot measure the work of God in our lives, let alone the true extent of our influence on others.

We are not called to live with a philosophy of fear but of faith in the overcomer (Rev. 2-3).

Some sheep follow close on the heels of the shepherd, while others move only because other sheep have moved. Our relationship with the Good Shepherd should not be a first-hand experience, not the second-hand experience of others.

“It is more noble to give yourself completely to one individual than to labor diligently for the salvation of the masses.” (Dag Hammarskjold)

We teach what we believe, but we reproduce what we are.

The gospels illustrate three levels of discipleship: the curious, the convinced, and the committed. A committed disciple is one who has genuine affection and love for the Savior and is obedient to His word.

We will not always understand the ways of God, but we are always called to trust Him. We honor Him best by continuing to trust Him in times when we do not understand Him.

Only true disciples will have the eyes to see, take the time to pray, and have the heart to go.

True education is a process of moving from cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty.

Solomon for a while kept ahead of the power curve of sin. But Solomon grew tired and sin did not. (Walt Henrichsen)

As we grow older in our faith, we tend to forget what it was like when we were lost. Remembering this motivates us to share our faith.

We are playing our lives before the grand audience of the Godhead.

We are invited to participate in the holy process of populating heaven and depopulating hell.

An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.

A poor workman always finds fault with his tools.

We can do much more when we think we can do it and we cannot do what we don't think we can do.

Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead-end street.

Faith is radical risk unsupported by advance information on the outcome. Faith is obedience—a leap and a commitment. It cannot be made without a measure of courage, and courage increases with repeated commitment. Daring to prove the mysteries that yield their secrets only as reward for risking. (Bennett Sims)

Faith works by love, not duty. It must be felt in the heart; it is a heart exchange. We should read the Word of God not just to learn about God but to love God. (Al Whittinghill)

Accepting the counsel of the Lord will bear fruit in the long run, though the results may be ambiguous in the short run. As we grow in Christ, we must learn to live with ambiguity and let loose of the craving to have all the answers.

Believers argue with God; skeptics argue with each other.

Doubt comes in at the window when inquiry is denied at the door. (Benjamin Jarett)

It would be a convenient arrangement were we so constituted that we could not talk better than we live. For reasons known to God, however, there seems to be no necessary connection between our speaking and our doing...we are long on talk and short on conduct. We use the language of power but our deeds are the deeds of weakness. (Tozer, *Born After Midnight*, 32)

Live your life so that you wouldn't be afraid to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.

Reputation is what others say about you; character is what God knows about you.

The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out.

Every Christian will become at last what his desires have made him. We are all the sum total of our hungers. (Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 55)

The secret to living is dying (John 12:24-26). Follow Christ; don't ask Him to follow you. There can be no half measures in your commitment.

We forfeited our rights when we became Christians.

God ascribes no value to temporal assets; He imputes worth to the individual.

Possessions are grease provided by God to lubricate the skids of life so that we can concentrate on the things that are truly important. (Henrichsen)

Self-ambition, self-indulgence, self-pity cause us to forget our calling to stand in the gap. Wallowing in the victimization of our lives rather than the victory we have in Christ.

Called to live with integrity and skill.

Questions related to discovering our character. What do I want most out of life? What do I think most in this life? What do I do with my leisure time? Who is the company I enjoy? Whom and what do I admire? What do I laugh at? (Adapted from Tozer)

In the perfect happiness of heaven nothing more will remain to be desired; in the full enjoyment of God man will obtain whatever he has desired in other things. (Aquinas)

We resist having to change. We just want to escape the consequences of the world being truly what it is and of our being who we truly are. (Adapted from Dallas Willard)

We can fashion ourselves by placing ourselves in the hands first of the supreme Artist, God, and then by subjecting ourselves to such holy influences and such formative powers as shall make him into a man of God. Or he may foolishly trust himself to unworthy hands and become at last a misshapen and inartistic vessel, of little use to mankind and a poor example of the skill of the heavenly Potter....We fashion ourselves by exposing our lives to the molding influences, good or bad, that lie around us. (Tozer, *Born After Midnight*, 127-28)

The unfortunate thing about this world is that good habits are so much easier to give up than bad ones. (Somerset Maugham)

It was not as said in Lord Acton's well-known statement, that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Rather, power makes corruption apparent, and absolute power makes corruption absolutely apparent. Thomas à Kempis was correct: "Occasions make not a man fail, but they show what the man is." (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 240-41)

Cultivate the mind of a subject in a kingdom. The King has all power and authority in His hand. The subject's life, occupation, department are dependent on the good pleasure of the King. Our lives are in His hands. He fashioned us in the womb. Recognize His sovereignty and develop a sense of dependency and submission. A trusting relationship.

There is no sin so great that God will not forgive, but there is no sin so small that it does not need to be forgiven.

We take care of our health, we lay up money, we make our roof tight and our clothing sufficient, but who provides wisely that he shall not be wanting in the best property of all—friends? (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Takers ultimately lose, but givers win forever. This is a rule the universe never breaks. (Douglas M. Lawson)

Reflect often on the person of God (self-existence, infinitude, eternity, unchangeableness, majesty), the powers of God (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence), and the perfections of God (holiness, love, mercy, truthfulness, faithfulness, goodness, patience, justice). Jeremiah 9:23-24.

God is what thought cannot better; God is whom thought cannot reach; God no thinking can conceive. Without God, man can have no being, no reason, no knowledge, no good desire, naught. Thou, O God, art what thou art, transcending all. (Eric Milner-White)

To think steadily of that to which the idea of origin cannot apply is not easy, if indeed it is possible at all. Just as under certain conditions a tiny point of light can be seen, not by looking directly at it but by focusing the eyes slightly to one side, so it is with the idea of the Uncreated. When we try to focus our thought upon One who is pure uncreated being we may see nothing at all, for He dwelleth in light that no man can approach unto. Only by faith and love are we able to glimpse Him as He passes by our shelter in the cleft of the rock. (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 33)

Love among men is awakened by something in the beloved, but the love of God is free, spontaneous, unevoked, uncaused. God loves men because He has chosen to love them. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 112)

A simple test before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial. THINK: Is it true, helpful, inspiring, necessary, kind? (Alan Redpath)

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness. (Reinhold Niebuhr)

You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing,

boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink. (G. K. Chesterton)

One act of thanksgiving when things go wrong is worth a thousand thanks when things go right. (John of Avila)

Martin Luther, holding a rose in his hand, said: "Tis a magnificent work of God: could a man make but one such rose as this, he would be thought worthy of all honor, but the gifts of God lose their value in our eyes, from their very infinity.

The virtue of gratitude. Whatever we become, wherever we go, whatever we do, we should never be unaware of what once was, what might have been and what could well be again. For the believer who understands this, "By God's grace I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10) is never pious rhetoric. "There but for the grace of God go I" is as realistic a statement as any we ever make. (Os Guinness, *In Two Minds*, 69)

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. (Frederick Buechner)

Seek guidance and you get nothing; seek God and you get guidance.

Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself. (C. S. Lewis, *The Best of CSL*, 112)

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened. (C. S. Lewis, *The Best of CSL*, 156-57)

Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not time enough to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of. ¶How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. Eternal years lie in His heart. For Him time does not pass, it remains; and those who are in Christ share with Him all the riches of limitless time and endless years. (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 52-53)

Hope does not reduce the ingredients of living, but adds God to the equation. Hope shouts, not because there is no enemy, but because God

gives the triumph. Hope sings, not because there is no night, but because God gives songs in the night. The pulse of hope is praise. (Morris Inch, Psychology in the Psalms)

If you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans.

I believe that the first test of a truly great man is his humility. Really great men have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them. And they see something divine in every other man and are endlessly, incredibly merciful. (John Ruskin)

Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with. (Peter Marshall)

Man is only a reed, the feeblest thing in nature, but, he is a thinking reed. It is not necessary for the entire universe to take up arms in order to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, is sufficient to kill him. But if the universe crushes him, man would still be nobler than the thing which destroys him, because he knows that he is dying, and the universe which has him at its mercy is unaware of it. (Blaise Pascal)

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. (Oliver Wendall Holmes)

When you put your stock in the world's system to evaluate yourself, you will wait in terror looking over your shoulder until someone rides into town who is faster on the draw than you. (Walt Henrichsen)

Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You took on You what was mine; yet set on me what was Yours. You became what You were not, that I might become what I was not. (Martin Luther)

Idolatry is trusting people, possessions or positions to do for me what only God can do. (Bill Gothard)

It is literally true that in judging others we trumpet abroad our secret faults. Allow any man to give free vent to his feelings about others and then you may with perfect safety turn and say, "Thou art the man." (J. A. Hadfield)

A man cannot speak but he judges himself. With his will or against his will, he draws his portrait to the eye of his companions by every word. Every opinion reacts on him who utters it." (Ralph Waldo Emerson) We are revealed by what we praise and what we condemn. Romans 2:1-2.

The Lord's Prayer: I cannot say "our" if I live only for myself. I cannot say "Father" if I do not endeavor each day to act like his child. I cannot say "who art in heaven" if I am laying up no treasure there. I cannot say "hallowed be Thy name" if I am not striving for holiness. I cannot say

"Thy kingdom come" if I am not doing all in my power to hasten that wonderful event. I cannot say "thy will be done" if I am disobedient to His word. I cannot say "on earth as it is in heaven" if I'll not serve Him here and now. I cannot say "give us this day our daily bread" if I am dishonest or am seeking things by subterfuge. I cannot say "forgive us our debts" if I harbor a grudge against anyone. I cannot say "lead us not into temptation" if I deliberately place myself in its path. I cannot say "deliver us from evil" if I do not put on the whole armor of God. I cannot say "Thine is the kingdom" if I do not give the King the loyalty due Him from a faithful subject. I cannot attribute to Him "the power" if I fear what men may do. I cannot ascribe to him "the glory" if I'm seeking honor only for myself, and I cannot say "forever" if the horizon of my life is bounded completely by time.

The paradox of the moral life consists in this: that the highest mutuality is achieved where mutual advantages are not consciously sought as the fruit of love. For love is purest where it desires no returns for itself; and it is most potent where it is purest. Complete mutuality, with its advantages to each party to the relationship, is therefore most perfectly realized where it is not intended, but love is poured out without seeking returns. That is how the madness of religious morality, with its trans-social ideal, becomes the wisdom which achieves wholesome social consequences. For the same reason, a purely prudential morality must be satisfied with something less than the best. (Reinhold Niebuhr quoted in *A Shattered Visage*, 145-56)

There is no act that begins with the love of God that does not end with the love of neighbor.

Four Personal Affirmations concerning temptation.

Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in Thee. (Augustine)

There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the dark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not find in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself. (Blaise Pascal)

God's purpose in creating you is that He wants to demonstrate to the universe through you that He is who He says He is and, in the process, wants to fulfill all your deepest longings. (Max Anders)

The thoughts that go through our minds early in the morning and late at night reveal much about our character and affections.

The real measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money. (John Henry Jowett)

The heart of the Bible is faith, which is commitment before knowledge. Growth in our relationship with God, involves a tremendous amount of risk. The more committed you are, the closer you are to the edge, and the more dependent you must become.

[Satan's] cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do [God's] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys. (C. S. Lewis)

Man is not at peace with his fellow man because he is not at peace with himself; he is not at peace with himself, because he is not at peace with God." (Thomas Merton)

I know of nothing more important than perseverance. Genius—that power which dazzles mortal eyes, is oft but perseverance in disguise." (Henry Austin)

Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. (Confucius)

To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour. (William Blake)

Your perspective determines your priorities/purpose, and your priorities determine your practice.

We are all conceived in close prison, and then all our life is but a going out to the place of execution, to death. Was any man seen to sleep in the cart . . . between prison and the place of execution? But we sleep all the way. From the womb to the grave, we are never thoroughly awake. (John Donne)

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. . . Life can never really be understood in time simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting-lace from which to understand it—backwards. (Soren Kierkegaard)

It is indeed natural to us to wish and to plan, and it is merciful in the Lord to disappoint our plans, and to cross our wishes. For we cannot be safe, much less happy, but in proportion as we are weaned from our own wills, and made simply desirous of being directed by His guidance. This truth (when we are enlightened by His Word) is sufficiently familiar to the

judgement; but we seldom learn to reduce it into practice without being trained a while in the school of disappointment. The schemes we form look so plausible and convenient that when they are broken we are ready to say, What a pity! We try again, and with no better success; we are grieved, and perhaps angry, and plan another, and so on; at length, in a course of time, experience and observation begin to convince us that we are not more able than we are worthy to choose aright for ourselves. Then the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon Him, and His promise to take care of us, appear valuable; and when *we* have done planning, His plan in our favor gradually opens, and He does more and better for us than we could either ask or think. I can hardly recollect a single plan of mine, of which I have not since seen reason to be satisfied that, had it taken place in season and circumstance just as I proposed, it would, humanly speaking, have proved my ruin; or at least it would have deprived me of the greater good the Lord had designed for me. We judge of things by their present appearance, but the Lord sees them in their consequences; if we could do so likewise, we should be perfectly of His mind; but as we cannot, it is an unspeakable mercy that He will manage for us, whether we are pleased with His management or not; and it is spoken of as one of His heaviest judgements, when He gives any person or people up to the way of their own hearts, and to walk after their own counsels. (John Newton)

If a man could have even half his wishes, he would double his troubles. (Ben Franklin)

In our prayers we seldom ask for a change of character, but always a change in circumstances.

Life becomes so filled with the if only's of the future that today becomes an inconvenient obstacle in the path of reaching tomorrow. And yet today is all we have. Life is filled with todays, and God wants His children to find joy in contentment.

Life is never long enough to put the Lord off until tomorrow. The things that are before are all too soon behind. We can never pick up the years we have put down. If we intend to walk with God tomorrow we must start today.

To live in the past and future is easy. To live in the present is like threading a needle. (Walker Percy)

To procrastinate is to put off until tomorrow the things you have already put off until today.

Our great business in life is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand. (Thomas Carlyle)

Instead of asking, "What will I leave behind me?" it is better to ask, "What am I going to take with me?"

The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration but its donation. (Corrie Ten Boom)

Jesus Christ's death purchased us and all that we have. We are His, not only by creation, but by redemption; this makes us doubly His.

Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their life-styles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot. (Gordon Dahl)

The idol of accomplishment produces overcommitment. This hinders the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and makes us relationally shallow. The danger of pursuing functional success while succumbing to relational failure.

Each person needs a Paul (a mentor who is willing and able to build into your life), a Barnabas (a colaborer who loves you and is willing to ask you tough questions to keep you honest), and a Timothy (a disciple into whose life you are building).

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you when forget-me-nots have withered. Carve your name on hearts, not on marble. (Charles H. Spurgeon)

When you are dealing with people, hope, but don't expect. (Leo Bartimier)

Give yourself to "the higher vision of the inner significance of people." (William James)

If you are serious about achieving progress with God against the temptations in your life, take your needs and weaknesses before God in prayer. Without repentance and obedience we remain mired in mediocrity, chained in the bondage of a visionless life. God cannot give us the blessings of faith until we take steps toward Him. This is the only way to know God's peace and power at the deeper levels. (Tom Eisenman)

It is awesome to realize that at the end of our lives we will be the sum total of our responses to God's answers to our prayers, for God has chosen to be limited in His next action by our response to His previous answer. The final outcome of our lives is decided by a life-long series of responses of God's answers to our prayers. The way we respond to God and then He, in turn, to us actually determines the direction our lives will take. (Evelyn Christenson)

The problem with Christianity is not that it has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult, and left untried. (G. K. Chesterton)

There are only two kinds of people in the world; and they are not the good and the bad, but the living and the dead, the twice-born and the once-born, the children of God and the children of Adam, the pregnant and the barren. That is the difference between heaven and hell. (Peter Kreeft)

There are two elements which are central in the Christian experience. First, a man hears God say, "Thou art the man." Secondly, he replies, "Thou art my God." (Brennan Manning)

When we refuse to acknowledge and repent of sin in our lives, it quenches the Spirit and removes our joy, certainty, and peace.

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; in feelings, not on figures on a dial. We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best. Life's but a means to an end; that end—beginning, mean, and end to all things—is God. (Philip James Bailey)

God's glory is the sum of His intrinsic eternal perfections. (Marvin Rosenthal)

God wants us to be elitist about ideas and egalitarian about people. Our culture tells us to do the opposite. (Peter Kreeft)

It is easy to lip-synch in the chorus of life, but each of us will have to sing solo before God.

Criteria for the believer's judgment: (1) obedience to the Lord's commandments, (2) stewardship of opportunities and resources, (3) response to circumstances, (4) our participation in the Great Commission. (Walt Henrichsen)

The only way to freedom is to live in the present now.

Securing yourself to admiration adulation will unsecure you to Christ.

There are times when it is necessary to let go of the illusory securities of the world so that we can find our true security in Christ. Luke 5:27—Levi's letting go of the trapeze and flying through midair to catch the arms of Jesus.

The petition "Lead us not into temptation" shows us that life is dangerous, that it can trip us up and ruin us, that we can stake everything on the wrong card.

God is the absolutely exalted, the holy King who dwells “in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16). There is but a single way which leads to God and that is not magic, not the possession of bewitching formulas or bewitching drinks, nor the precise and respectful following of cosmic rules. The only way is the way of bowing down in humility before the countenance of God, of accepting His grace in Jesus Christ. At the moment that you do this, God becomes your God, and then in the most veritable sense the entire cosmos is yours, “and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (1 Corinthians 3:23). (Hermann Bavinck)

Austerity has always made me happy and its opposite, miserable. I find it strange that, knowing this, I should so often have inflicted upon myself the nausea of overindulgence, and had to fight off the black dogs of satiety. Human beings, as Pascal points out, are peculiar in that they avidly pursue ends they know will bring them no satisfaction; gorge themselves with food which cannot nourish and with pleasures which cannot please. I am a prize example. (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*)

Dying men have said, “I am sorry I have been an atheist, infidel, agnostic, skeptic, or sinner,” but no man ever said on his deathbed, “I am sorry I have lived a Christian life.” (Bob Jones, Sr.)

Take an ocean full of beef stew, complete with carrots, potatoes, celery—the works. All the amino acids, DNA, RNA, peptide chains and organic molecules needed for life. Stir it around for several billion years, and what will you have? Very, very old beef stew. And we actually give credence to an explanation of the origins of life that evolved with so much less to go on? Wrong recipe. One might better direct one’s attention to the Cook. (Paul Thielen)

No one should hold the fantastic idea that he knows himself well enough. (Erasmus, *Enchiridion*)

It is easy to find a logical and virtuous reason for not doing what you don’t want to do. (John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*) A person always has two reasons for doing anything—a good reason and the real reason. (J. Pierpont Morgan)

Idealism increases in direct proportion to one’s distance from the problem. (John Galsworthy)

The fact that modern man has been able to preserve such a good opinion of himself despite all the obvious refutations of his optimism particularly in his own history leads to the conclusion that there is a very stubborn source of resistance in man to the acceptance of the most obvious and irrefutable evidence about his moral qualities. (Reinhold Niebuhr)

The man who lives by himself and for himself is apt to be corrupted by the company he keeps. (Charles H. Parkhurst)

We usually think that God's calling is in the dramatic and large things and thus miss the many subtle day-to-day opportunities to serve others.

We lose the peace of years when we hunt after the rapture of the moment.

You can accomplish much more when you don't care who gets the credit.

It is much easier to serve the masses rather than the Master.

People today are much more interested in being envied than respected. (Gary Trudeau)

Unbelief is the basis of sin, deceitfulness is the character of sin, and pride is the strength of sin. (Edwin Cole)

The best response to spiritual truth: study it through, pray it in, live it out, pass it on.

Our vocation in this world is to extend the invisible geography of the new creation.

The gospel is the offer of God's ability to make us into the people we were meant to be all along.

The three spiritual wounds of contrition, compassion, and longing after God.

Jesus gave His life for us that He might give His life to us that He might live His life through us. (Bob George)

The principle of first and second things: in any area of life, putting second things first loses not only the first things but also the second things, and putting first things first gains not only the first things but the second things as well. (C. S. Lewis, Peter Kreeft)

Questions for self-examination: (1) Am I fully confessed? Are there any unturned stones? (2) What are my fears for the future? Are there any things I am not laying on the altar? (3) What am I risking for Christ? What principles guide my life? (5) What am I currently doing that others can do, while missing those things that others cannot do? (6) Who are the people I should seek as resources? (Larry Moody)

Three characteristics of a new creation in Christ: (1) a recognition of sinfulness, (2) a renovation of character, (3) a redirection of energies. (John MacArthur)

Three central qualities of the spiritual life: (1) a renewed mind, (2) reliance on the Spirit, (3) radical obedience.

There is a significant difference between wanting to serve God (doing) and wanting to be like Him (being).

There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demoniac it will be if it rebels. It's not out of bad mice or bad fleas you make demons, but out of bad archangels. The false religion of lust is baser than the false religion of mother-love or patriotism or art: but lust is less likely to be made into a religion. (C. S. Lewis)

I may, I suppose, regard myself as, or pass for being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue—that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfillment. Yet I say to you—and I beg you to believe me—multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are. (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*)

Seven scriptural laws of success: (1) "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). This means putting God first in our lives, even our business lives. Value the God connection you have. (2) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Care for your associates, treat them as you would want to be treated. If you want to be helped then help others to be successful. (3) Meditate upon His Word day and night. Read God's Word regularly and put it into practice. Read the first psalm. It says that if you stay in His Word you will be successful in whatever you do. (4) Develop a good prayer life and make your requests known to God. This improves your relationship with God and you will be surprised with the friends that you have in high places. (5) Give of your success. With what you have been blessed of God then sow back into His kingdom. Take time to give of yourself as well as your resources. (6) Feed your mind with a good positive attitude. Listen to good teaching tapes. Remember the reports of Joshua and Caleb against those of the twelve spies. They saw big grapes whereas the others saw themselves as grasshoppers. (7) Fellowship with good friends. God's word says in the multitude of counselors there is safety. Associate with people whose

opinions you respect and know that you can rely on. A support group can be a great help when things seem to be going wrong.

Power, success, happiness, as the world knows them, are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, joy, are only from God. And God is the enemy whom Jacob fought there by the river, of course, and whom in one way or another we all of us fight—God, the beloved enemy. Our enemy because, before giving us everything, He demands of us everything; before giving us life, He demands our lives—our selves, our wills, our treasure. (Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*)

Especially should ministers of the gospel search their own hearts and look deep into their inner motives. No man is worthy to succeed until he is willing to fail. No man is morally worthy of success in religious activities until he is willing that the honor of succeeding should go to another if God so wills. (A. W. Tozer, *Born After Midnight*, 58)

Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo, as Aldous Huxley envisaged in *Brave New World*, the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the Cross signifies. And it is the Cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ. (Malcolm Muggeridge) [Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, 66-67]

We must cultivate a spiritual appetite so that we will love the things that endure and reject the things that pass.

Four truths to hold onto during times of fear and adversity: (1) God brought me here, (2) He will sustain me here, (3) He will teach me here, (4) He will bring me out in His time and way. (Steve Ellis)

When God wants to accomplish an impossible task, He takes an impossible man and crushes him.

God makes chaos out of our order to teach us to look to Him to make His order out of our chaos.

We must be freed from sin in order to be free to love.

God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him. (Jim Elliot)

It would be well for us if we could learn early the futility of trying to obtain forbidden things by over-persuading God. He will not be thus stampeded. Anything that falls within the circle of His will He gives freely to whosoever asks aright, but not days or weeks of fasting and prayer will persuade Him to alter anything that has gone out of His mouth. (A. W. Tozer)

We must care for our bodies as though we were going to live forever, but we must care for our souls as if we were going to die tomorrow. (St. Augustine)

Write your obituary now and see if it will play well in heaven. (Bill Garrison)

What are you taking under your arm to the ultimate show and tell? (Bill Garrison)

Everyone ought to fear to die until he has done something that will always live.

As the wedding at Cana illustrates, the world pours out its best wine first, but the miracle in the Christian life is that the best is reserved for last. (Soren Kierkegaard)

When elderly people are asked what they would change if they could live their lives again, many say they would reflect more, risk more, and do more things that would last.

God is more interested in changing you than in changing your circumstances.

We must trust God in the darkness for what He has revealed to us in the light. (Larry Moody)

God's past performance is the basis for our future reliance.

Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important. (C. S. Lewis)

Our opinions become fixed at the point we stop thinking. (Joseph Ernest Renan)

To know things as they are is better than to believe things as they seem. (Tom Wicker)

Our leisure, even our play, is a matter of serious concern. There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan. (C. S. Lewis)

O Lord, I know only one thing, and that is that it is good to follow You and wicked to offend You. Beyond this, I do not know what is good for me, whether health or sickness, riches or poverty, or anything else in this world. This knowledge surpasses both the wisdom of men and of angels. It lies hidden in the secrets of Your providence, which I adore, and will not dare to pry open. (Blaise Pascal)

Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us; and the art of life is to get the message. (Malcolm Muggeridge)

Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind by His truth; the purifying of the imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy of that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. (William Temple)

If a tree is worthy of aesthetic admiration, a dog of personal affection, and a person of self-giving love, then the only worthy relation that a human being can have to God is worship. (Edward John Carnell)

We must learn the reflex of trust and allow God in His timing to do what He knows to be best; a conscious choice of the will to transfer the outcome to God. (John Willett)

Sometimes we are tempted to think of God as carrying out His plans at our expense. But the biblical portrait of His character as revealed in His costly acts of redemptive love proves that this is a distorted view of God. It is His gracious intention to fulfill our needs and thus draw us to Himself. It is Satan's intention to deceive us into going anywhere--to ourselves, to other people, to things--anywhere but to God in our quest for significance and identity. (Reflections)

God tells us and demonstrates in Jesus that we have extraordinary worth and importance in His sight. Our task is to accept by faith the truths that we have been created in His image to know and enjoy Him forever, that we have been placed in the body of Christ to function as an extension of His incarnation, and that we have been chosen to rule the universe as vice-regents with Christ. (Reflections)

We were created to know God and to find in our relationship with Him the joy and meaning we seek. Thus, God in His love and mercy uses our needs to drive us from futility to fulfillment. (Reflections)

God has gifted us to achieve whatever He asks of us, and He has given us enough time to do it. Moreover, success in His sight is not the same as success in the sight of men because it does not depend on results. Our

work is faithfulness; His is results. "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The Christian who grasps the implications of these truths becomes free from the competitive need to win, free from dominating and resenting others, and free from pursuing achievements in order to validate self-worth. (Reflections)

Wisdom is the Lord's plan by which He transforms a lifeless chaos into a living cosmos (Prov. 8:22-31). Similarly, wisdom is the Lord's plan by which He can transmute the moral and spiritual chaos of a human life into an incarnation of God's sublime attributes of justice, equity, truth, and faithfulness. (Reflections)

According to James, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:17). Without a relationship with the Source of wisdom, we are limited solely to human shrewdness and craft: "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (Jas. 3:15-16). The Scriptures draw a sharp contrast--earthly wisdom leads to disorder, evil, ugliness, and disappointment; divine wisdom bears the fruit of order, goodness, beauty, and fulfillment. The tragedy is that so many people pursue earthly wisdom hoping to attain the fruit that can only be produced by the wisdom which comes from above. (Reflections)

We should daily remind ourselves of who God really is: the Creator of the hundreds of billions of galaxies; the sovereign God who inhabits the future as well as the present and the past; the almighty One who dwells in all places, and from whom no thought is hidden; clothed in power, glory, and dominion, He reigns over the cosmos in the beauty of holiness. (Reflections)

"The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor" (Prov. 15:33). The walk of wisdom is the conscious recognition that all we have and are come from God, and that every aspect of our lives needs to be under His dominion. The fool arrogantly vaunts an attitude of independence and autonomy, but the person who is wise lives in dependence and radical trust in the Author and Giver of life. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We will grow in wisdom as we daily cultivate the attitude of awe and humility in our walk with God. (Reflections)

The cultivation of a reverential attitude of awe for the eternal, holy, and almighty Ruler of all creation and a humble attitude of radical trust and dependence upon Him in every facet of life is the foundation upon which true skill in the art of living is built. (Reflections)

Only two things on earth will go into eternity--God's Word and people. God has placed us here to grow in Christ and to reproduce the life of Christ in others. Each of us has specific opportunities to do this in our own spheres of influence, and as we abide in Christ and let His words abide in us, we will bear lasting fruit (John 15:7-8), and the living God will confirm the work of our hands. (Reflections)

Paul had only two days on his calendar: "today" and "that day" (the day he would be with the Lord). He had a heart of wisdom because he lived each today in light of that day. Because he daily reminded himself of the real purpose for his sojourn on earth, he cultivated an eternal perspective that influenced all his work and all his relationships. (Reflections)

1. What is wisdom? Wisdom is the skill in the art of living life with every area under the dominion of God. It is the ability to use the best means at the best time to accomplish the best ends. Wisdom is the key to a life of beauty, fulfillment, and purpose.
2. How do we pursue wisdom? The treasure of wisdom rests in the hands of God. Since it comes from above (Jas. 3:17), we cannot attain it apart from Him.
3. What are the conditions for attaining wisdom? True wisdom can only be gained by cultivating the fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10).
4. What is the fear of the Lord? To fear God is to have an attitude of awe and humility before Him. It is to recognize our creaturehood and our need for complete dependence upon Him in every activity of our lives.
5. Why have so few people developed this twin attitude of awe and humility toward God? The temporal value system of this world is based on what is seen, while the eternal value system of Scripture is based on what is unseen. The former exerts a powerful influence upon us, and it is not surprising that so many Christians struggle with giving up the seen for the unseen.
6. What can enable us to reject the temporal value system and choose the eternal value system? An eternal perspective can only be cultivated by faith, that is, believing God in spite of appearances and circumstances.
7. How do we grow in faith? Our ability to trust God is directly proportional to our knowledge of God. The better we know Him, the more we can trust Him.

8. How can we increase in our knowledge of God? The answer rests in the fact that God is a person. Scripture tells us that God, the most significant person in the universe, wants us to know Him. He is the initiator, and He waits for our response. When we accept Christ's gift of new life by trusting in Him, the relationship begins. It is only as we get to know God as a person that we will grow in our love for Him. He knows us completely, and we do not need to be afraid of being open with Him in our thoughts and feelings. We cannot become intimate with God unless we talk with Him and listen to His voice in Scripture on a daily basis. To know God is to love Him, and to love Him is to want to respond to His desires for our lives. Faith in God is simply trusting Him as a person, and trust is manifested in action. (Reflections)

Tests are a normative experience for a believer in Christ. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (Jas. 1:2). James is not advocating a form of spiritual masochism--trials and tests come in all shapes and forms ("various"), and none of them are fun. But if we recognize the divine purpose behind them, we can "consider it all joy" not because of what they are, but because of what they produce. (Reflections)

Christian character is forged and refined in the furnace of affliction. God uses this process to reveal impurities in our lives by bringing them to the surface so that we can deal with them. As we respond by trusting God in spite of circumstances (the essence of faith), we continue to mature into greater Christlikeness. "And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:4). (Reflections)

God hates sin, not only because it is contrary to His character, but also because of what it does to our lives. We must learn to hate sin for the same reasons. As new creatures in Christ, we no longer need be slaves of sin (Rom. 6:10-23). Instead, we can walk in the wisdom of this passage by recognizing the anatomy of sin and dealing with it in its earliest stages. When we walk in the Spirit in conformity with who we have become in Christ, we can say no to the deceptions and enticements of sin and yes to the meaning and purpose we have found as the first fruits among His creatures. (Reflections)

God's gifts are always good and He never tempts us. When we succumb to temptation, it is because we have taken our eyes off Him and forgotten who we have become in Christ. (Reflections)

"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was" (Jas. 1:23-24). The Word is like a moral mirror that strips away our outer veneer and shows us what we are really like (see Heb. 4:12-13). Working through Scripture, the Spirit reveals areas of our lives which need to be

changed. When we see these areas and do nothing about them, it is as foolish as a person who looks in a mirror, realizes he has forgotten to put on his pants, and continues to walk out of the house. Revelation is designed to transform, not merely inform, but it cannot accomplish this without our response. (Reflections)

It is easy to engage in ritual without a relationship and to pursue outer conformity without inward commitment. There is a strong tendency in our culture to compartmentalize Christianity by reducing it to church attendance, prayers, and giving. When this happens, we fail to see its relevance to the rest of life and we become "religious" people whose behavior outside of church is hardly different from that of those who have not trusted in Christ. (Reflections)

The truth of Scripture was revealed not only to change our way of thinking but also our way of acting. Without an active response of obedience, it cannot accomplish its purpose in our lives. But before we can respond to the truth we must know and believe it. There is a reciprocal relationship between belief and behavior: just as attitude leads to action, so action creates or reinforces attitude. Faith grows as we plug it into life. When we put a principle into practice, the principle becomes more real to us, which then makes it easier to practice, and so forth. A loving attitude toward another person leads to loving actions on that person's behalf. But the other side of the coin is that by acting as if we love another person, our attitude toward him or her actually moves in that direction. (Reflections)

James says in 2:8-11 that receiving others on the basis of outward appearances is contrary to the "royal law" which says that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Jas. 2:8). Our neighbors are the people whose need we see (cf. Luke 10:30-37). "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jas. 2:9). When we show partiality toward those with higher socio-economic status, we are loving ourselves above our neighbors by treating people not for who they really are, but for what they can do for us. (Reflections)

Those who show partiality do so by sitting in judgment of others and acting without mercy toward those who do not measure up. But just as God's mercy in Christ triumphed over our condemnation as sinners, so mercy should triumph over condemnation in our attitudes towards others. (Reflections)

Scripture frequently calls us to examine ourselves. What is there about you that cannot be accounted for apart from the reality of Christ in your life? If your belief in Christ has not produced any qualitative change, the epistle of James would counsel you to consider whether yours is a professional or a possessional faith. Is yours merely an intellectual acknowledgement about Christ, or is it also a volitional response to Christ?

It is one thing to believe about Him; it is another to trust in Him.  
(Reflections)

We are springs with two sources. One source produces the bitter water of angry, jealous, spiteful, hateful, malicious, sarcastic, slanderous, critical, abusive, self-pitying, cruel, proud words. The other source produces the fresh water of encouraging, comforting, kindhearted, compassionate, considerate, humble, gracious, gentle, patient, loving, respectful, thoughtful, prudent words. The source of the former is the flesh; the source of the latter is the Spirit. We should memorize Paul's words and bring them to mind each day: "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16,25). (Reflections)

The Scriptures repeatedly call us to unify our words and our works, our lips and our lives. Consider James 3:13: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." A person may be able to speak the truth, but if he does not live it, the disparity between his deeds and his doctrine reveal a lack of wisdom, the skill of incarnating eternal values in a temporal arena.  
(Reflections)

Earthly wisdom is derived from the values of the world system which lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Divine wisdom is not earthbound, but comes down from above and reflects the character of God. The life of Christ Jesus, "who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30), is the supreme manifestation of godly wisdom. (Reflections)

o the extent that we do not look to the Lord to meet all of our needs, we inevitably turn to people, things, or circumstances to fulfill them. Worldly wisdom tells us to use people, not serve them. Divine wisdom tells us that we are free to serve people because our needs are already satisfied in Christ. We are unconditionally loved and accepted as children in the Father's family; we have true significance and identity as members of the body of Christ; and the indwelling Spirit has given us the competence to achieve God's purposes for our lives as living stones in His temple. If we do not find our security and significance in Christ, we become grabbers rather than givers. Like two people trying to get the same parking space, we compete for power, prestige, status, pleasure, and recognition. The inner conflict in the lives of Christians who are walking after the flesh and not in the power of the Spirit produces the outer conflict of competition and contention. (Reflections)

If we accept the perspective of Scripture, there are only two courses of action which are open to us. We will either pursue friendship with the world by adopting a set of temporal convictions, or we will pursue

friendship with God by adopting eternal convictions. Many believers, however, deceive themselves into thinking there is a third option: the best of both worlds. Usually this translates into a quest for success as the world defines it (prosperity, pleasure, power, prestige), covered by a Christian veneer. James plainly states that Christian values will never stick to the world's surface. They are as incompatible as light and darkness, wisdom and foolishness, hope and despair, freedom and slavery, life and death. Either the unseen or the seen will be ultimate in our lives; there is no third way. (Reflections)

The solution to adultery with the world is allegiance to God. We were created to serve, but we have been given a choice: serve the world as slaves of sin and selfishness or serve the Lord as "slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). It is only as we submit our desires, plans, careers, and hopes to Christ that we will find the freedom and fulfillment that we seek. By taking His yoke upon ourselves we become free to realize His high calling for our lives. (Reflections)

Those who presume against the future become complacent about the present. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17). "I know I should be giving to support Christian ministries . . . maybe later when this deal goes through." "If I can just get my business on a firmer foundation, I'll be able to spend more time with my wife and children." The problem is that there may not be a later; we can only be sure about now. We miss out on the opportunities of the present when we dwell in our speculations about the future. Those who presume against the future have embraced the illusion that their destiny is in their own hands. It is foolish to sacrifice present opportunities for doing good on the altar of future prospects. (Reflections)

"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). From a human perspective, it would appear that the promise of the Lord's coming is an empty hope. But from God's perspective, the last two thousand years is more like a delay of two days (see 2 Pet. 3:8-9). As believers, we should strengthen our hearts in the living hope of the nearness of Christ's return. "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end." (Reflections)

e the prophets, when we face times of personal affliction, we must entrust ourselves to the Lord. Unlike the prophets, Job's endurance was rewarded in his lifetime. He lost his family, his possessions, and his health, but when God restored him, Job gained far more than what he had lost. The life of Job illustrates that it always pays to wait upon the Lord, regardless of our circumstances. The book of Job teaches us about the goodness, wisdom, and sovereignty of God. Because He is good, God has our best interests at heart. Because He is wise, His plan for our lives is better than

our own. And because He is sovereign, His loving purposes will be fulfilled. (Reflections)

Prayer is the Christian's greatest but most frequently ignored privilege. The creator and sustainer of the universe has granted each of His children direct access to bring their burdens, their hopes, their fears, their plans, and their desires to Him. Jesus the Son of God can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He has been "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). (Reflections)

Broken horizontal relationships with people can hamper our vertical relationship with God. If we are harboring resentment, anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness, we will certainly not be able to approach God with a pure heart. We cannot enjoy fellowship with the God of light if we are walking in the darkness of sinful attitudes and actions. (Reflections)

Do not grovel in self-pity or paralyze yourself with introspection. Satan seeks to afflict us with a general sense of condemnation, but the Holy Spirit lovingly convicts us of specific sins that need to be confessed so that we can have the joy of fellowship with Him. (Reflections)

Prayer is a declaration of dependence upon the author and giver of life. It is a child's appeal to his heavenly Father. It is the indispensable vehicle for talking with and listening to the Lord of the universe. It is the means by which we draw near and become intimate with the One who can sympathize with our weaknesses. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). (Reflections)

God, who is both outside of time and in all times at once, has chosen to weave our prayers in the fabric of His eternal plan. Mysteriously, the Lord has decreed that the prayers of His people are the means by which He accomplishes His purposes on earth. If we grasped the implications of this, we would more consistently approach God with our concerns for ourselves and others. (Reflections)

In Christ, there is no room for boasting. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The distinctions of wealth, class, education, and influence that we draw and so often use to measure the value of people mean nothing in God's sight. Now we may acknowledge this truth, but it is difficult to embrace and apply it. When we encounter other people, we will either see them from the world's point of view or from a biblical point of view. Paul made a resolution that we should also adopt: "Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). (Reflections)

As Martin Luther observed, nothing ages more quickly than gratitude. It is all too easy to forget the providential hand of God in our lives and to act as though "My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). When this happens, we slip into the pride of self-sufficiency and independence. The bankruptcy of our previous position is forgotten, the sting of our former dilemma fades, a sense of God's conviction wears off, and our acknowledgement of God's grace becomes routine and matter of fact (Os Guinness, *In Two Minds*).

It is important to cultivate the habit of remembering who God is, what difference it would make if He were not there, and where we would be apart from Him. The spiritual discipline of keeping alive a grateful memory is crucial, because it is a declaration of dependence and a statement of radical reliance upon the love, goodness, and faithfulness of the one who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). (Reflections)

Everything else on this planet will eventually perish, but people were made for eternity. A kind word, a generous act, a thoughtful gesture: these are things that enrich our lives with depth and quality. (Reflections)

Growth ceases when self-satisfaction slips in. We must not succumb to the delusion that we "have arrived" in any area. Rather, we are called to press on to a greater realization of what it means to be in Christ in each facet of our lives. (Reflections)

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). The "things that are excellent" are those things that really matter, the things that really make a difference in life. It is not enough simply to discern the good from the bad; God wants us to discern the difference between the good and the best. It has been said that "the good is the enemy of the best." The pursuit of wisdom involves an awareness of this more subtle difference. (Reflections)

Spiritual fruit is not created by depending on our own resources or on those of people, possessions, or position. It is the fruit that Christ Himself bears in our lives as we allow Him to live and reign in us. To abide in Christ is to walk in the power of the Spirit. To the extent that we choose to do so, we will manifest the Christlike characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). This is the kind of fruit we really want to bear: "the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). God is glorified when we bear this fruit because it is the manifestation of His life in us. "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8). (Reflections)

Paul practiced what might be called the biblical power of positive thinking. This is not the illusion that "every day and in every way, I'm getting better and better," but the reality of what it means to be in Christ: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). This is a difficult verse for many of us to apply because it is so contrary to our usual tendency to complain and to look on the shadow side of people and events. But if we engage in the discipline of setting aside a time at the beginning of each day to meditate ("let your mind dwell") on these truths, it will move us in the direction of seeing ourselves for who we really are: overcomers in Christ (Rom. 8:37). (Reflections)

When we respond correctly to adverse circumstances, they ultimately enhance rather than hinder our relationship with God and others. Part of a correct response is the acknowledgement that God is sovereign over all of our circumstances, and that He never places us in a situation where we must fail. We must learn to trust Him in times of adversity and to expect Him to work in ways that we cannot foresee. When we remember what He has accomplished for us in the past, it will be easier to trust Him with our futures. (Reflections)

While affliction is never desirable in itself, it is often the most effective way to break us away from trivial pursuit to see the deeper issues of life. It can pry us away from our insistence on self-sufficiency and lead us into an awareness of our need to depend on the resources of our heavenly Father. This is why the psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:67,71; cf. 119:75). When our toys possess our hearts, it may take nothing less than the severe mercy of God to take them away long enough for us to realize that our real treasure is Christ. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25-26). (Reflections)

Whether you like it or not, believers and unbelievers in your web of relationships are watching you. The people in your relational network of family, friends, associates, co-workers, neighbors, relatives, and occasional contacts form a picture of you that is shaped by your words and works, your actions and attitudes. The more these people associate you as a follower of Christ, the greater your potential impact for influencing their understanding of what Christianity is all about, whether positively or negatively. Your responses to the situations you face inevitably produce ripples in the waters that surround you, and because of this, what you say and do as an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) is important. (Reflections)

Paul placed his hope squarely on the promises of God. His greatest risk was not the physical danger and human opposition that often beset him (see 2 Cor. 11:23-27), but his decision to put every area of his life under the dominion of Christ. He staked everything, including his ambition and reputation, on his commitment to the character of Christ. If Jesus is who He claims to be, then He is worthy of the most radical trust. We can depend on Him to see us through any situation into which He calls us. (Reflections)

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake" (Phil. 1:21-24). As far as Paul is concerned, this is not a win-lose situation, because physical death does not mean annihilation, an intermediate state of unconsciousness, a negative period of discipline, or another in an endless series of unpredictable incarnations on this planet. For the one who trusts in Christ, death is the doorway to an unimaginable dimension of fellowship with the living God. (Reflections)

"It is want of faith that makes us opt for earthly rather than heavenly treasure. If we really believed in celestial treasures, who among us would be so stupid as to buy gold? We just do not believe. Heaven is a dream, a religious fantasy which we affirm because we are orthodox. If people believed in heaven, they would spend their time preparing for permanent residence there. But nobody does." (John White)

To "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects" (Col. 1:10) is to identify with nothing less than the highest standard of conduct in one's personal and professional life. Most of us are familiar with Paul's challenge in Romans 12:2 not to be conformed to this world. We know that as followers of Christ, we are called to pursue higher standards than those of the culture that surrounds us. But it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the standards that prevail in the Christian community are the same as Christian standards. The Christian subculture has often been characterized by compromise and a shallowness that is not worthy of the gospel of Christ. Our mission is not to conform to compromise or to rationalize our behavior by pointing to what other believers are doing. Appearances are often deceiving and we can get away with a great deal by putting up a good front. But "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). All things are "open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). (Reflections)

If we are more concerned with being pleasing to Christ than with winning the approval of people, if we do our work "heartily, as for the Lord rather

than for men" (Col. 3:23; Eph. 6:7), we will find ourselves striving toward a higher standard than we would have otherwise chosen, a standard prompted by the Holy Spirit within rather than by outward conformity. In fact, we will discover again and again that the standard is humanly unattainable. It can only be achieved by Christ living His life in us. To the extent that we grasp this truth, we will look to the grace of God and walk in conscious dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit. When we strive in the power of the flesh we will fail, and the results will be evident, sooner or later. (Reflections)

We often find ourselves tempted to do things when we are alone that we would not think of doing if others were present. Yet we are never alone. The comforting thought that Christ is always with us should also stimulate us to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him. Holiness is synonymous with practicing the presence of Christ. (Reflections)

The spiritual life was never meant to be lived alone, but in a context of community with like-minded believers. Without the encouragement, support, teaching, love, exhortation, and prayers of other members of the body of Christ, we would be unable to grow in the faith and embrace values that are diametrically opposed to those of our culture. True religion, as James 1:27 tells us, is not a compartmentalized, private matter. Instead, a growing vertical relationship with Christ is meant to spill over into every facet of a person's life and have an effect on each one of the person's horizontal relationships. Christian maturity does not spring out of isolation; it is nourished through involvement. (Reflections)

It has been said that the most valuable tool possessed by the evil one is the wedge. If he can drive it between brothers and sisters in Christ on an individual or a group level, he hinders the cause of Christ through the fragmentation and factions that result. If believers are expending their energy in internal attacks, criticism, envy, jealousy, slander, and bitterness, they will be ill-prepared to withstand external opposition. Spiritual maturity and victory depend on maintaining "one spirit, with one mind," or as Paul put it in another epistle written during his first Roman imprisonment, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:3-6). (Reflections)

Imagine a world where people's problems cease at the moment they put their faith in Christ. They suddenly become immune to bodily ailments, they enjoy complete harmony in their personal and professional relationships, and success and affluence are theirs for the asking. Actually, this trouble-free state of affairs is not far from the scenario touted by the peddlers of the "prosperity gospel." It may sound good at first, but

consider a few of the implications. They may trust Christ for their salvation, but it would be extremely difficult for them not to look to the world for everything else. Because there are no obstacles, they would soon take God for granted and presume upon His grace; their prayers would become more like conjuring tricks than acknowledgements of love and dependence on the Lord. And since everything goes "their way," it would be almost impossible for them to cultivate true Christian character. They would never develop qualities like endurance (Jas. 1:3), steadfastness (1 Cor. 15:58), thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:18), diligence, moral excellence, self-control, perseverance, godliness (2 Pet. 1:5-6), compassion, humility, gentleness, patience (Col. 3:12), and faithfulness (Gal. 5:22), since these are related to hoping in God in a context of adversity. (Reflections)

Far from promising a life of ease and prosperity, the New Testament actually affirms that those who follow Christ will face a new dimension of obstacles and struggles that they did not know before they committed their lives to Him. In fact, the intensity of the spiritual warfare is proportional to the seriousness of a believer's response to the terms of discipleship. "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). This is why Paul encouraged the disciples in Asia Minor to continue in the faith, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). At the end of His last discourse to His disciples, Jesus assured them, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). (Reflections)

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a servant of men, is so fantastic that apart from a revelation, no one would have imagined it. The idea that the eternal, living God, clothed in majesty and splendor, the creator and sustainer of the billions of galaxies, would take on human flesh and enter His own creation boggles the mind. The greater our picture of God, the more amazing the concept of the Incarnation becomes. ¶Add to this the further idea that this God-Man did not enter the planet in power and glory, but in the weakness and vulnerability of an infant who would grow to become the lover and servant of the poor, the sick, and the sorrowful; that during the years of His earthly ministry He would continually minister to the needs of the multitudes and the disciples; and that He would willingly endure the rejection and ridicule of His own people. As if this were not incredible enough, imagine that He would suffer His face to be slapped and covered with spittle, His beard to be ripped out, His back to be lacerated, His head to be wreathed with thorns driven in with rods, His hands and feet to be cruelly pierced, His ears filled with mockery, His eyes filled with tears as He bore the incalculable weight of human sins, His heart broken as He was separated from His Father so that we could be forgiven and liberated from our bondage to death. ¶The world has never seen anything like it, nor will it see it again. Nothing in human thought, no philosophy, no other religion could have entertained such a thing.

Jesus the Messiah--the incarnate Word, the embodiment of truth and life, the Creator and Lord over the heavens and the earth, the visible and invisible, the One before whom the superhuman thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities must bow--entered human history as a servant. This was His purpose before He permanently united Himself with humanity, even before the morning stars sang together and shouted for joy over the wisdom and beauty of His exquisite creation: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Reflections)

In God's kingdom, honor is always preceded by humility (Prov. 18:12). It is only as we walk in dependence on the power of the Spirit that we are enabled to pursue the radically different value system that was perfectly modeled by our Lord. He told us to let go of the seen to gain the unseen (Matt. 6:19-21), to give so that we can receive (Luke 6:38), to lose our lives in order to save them (Luke 9:23-24), to serve if we want to lead (Mark 10:42-45), and to be last if we want to be first (Matt. 19:27-30). (Reflections)

The model for the believer's life is the character of Christ. The highest possible calling of any human being is Christlikeness, and this is what our heavenly Father intends for His children. But this standard excels the greatest human efforts to attain it, and it can only be achieved when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and allow Christ to live His life in us. This is not a once-for-all decision, but an ongoing realization. (Reflections)

When we emulate the character of Christ by seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness, it is always worth the cost involved (2 Cor. 4:17; cf. Mark 10:29-30). The wisdom of this world unavoidably exerts an influence on us, but the wisdom from above is more subtle; we must choose to be shaped by it. The former tells us that the pursuit of the invisible over the visible is a course of foolishness and failure. The latter warns us that the rewards of this world are hollow and transitory, and exhorts us to be more concerned about what will last forever. It takes great risk to put our hope in what is not seen, but this is the essence of faith. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (Rom. 8:24-25). (Reflections)

Before God, we have no rights--only privileges. We can delude ourselves through empty conceit to think otherwise, but this leads only to selfishness and conflict. Or we can walk in wisdom by submitting our privileges to Him who told us to love, serve, edify, forgive, and give preference to one another. "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). (Reflections)

The King of the universe, the Lord of glory, voluntarily became a pauper for our sake. He had to borrow a place to be born, a boat to preach from, a place to sleep, a donkey to ride upon, an upper room to use for the last supper, and a tomb in which to be buried. He created the world, but the world did not know Him. He was insulted, humiliated, and rejected by the people He made. Yet He loved them even to the end, submitting to an agonizing and ignominious death ("Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" Gal. 3:13; cf. Deut. 21:22-23). "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). It has been observed that only a divine being can accept death as obedience; for ordinary men it is a necessity. (Reflections)

The name of the Lord Jesus has been elevated above every other name, and it delights the heart of God when people speak well of that name. As Peter proclaimed, "there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Every knee will bow before that name and all will acknowledge the lordship of Jesus (cf. Isaiah 45:23; "to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear"). (Reflections)

The individual and corporate lifestyle to which we as God's children have been called cannot possibly be led in the power of the flesh. Attempts to do so create only a facade, a thin veneer of spirituality that cracks and peels off when exposed to the heat and pressure of problems and conflicts. Without the work of the Spirit, the unity, love, mutuality of purpose, and concern for others (Phil. 1:27; 2:1-4) that Paul longed for in the churches is unattainable. (Reflections)

we are profoundly shaped by our environment and uncritically embrace far more of the consciousness of our culture and age than we would like to think. It takes no effort to be dominated by the surrounding mentality--any dead fish can float downstream. But it requires discipline and the grace of God to swim against the current by renewing our minds with the truth that will endure to all generations and by pursuing God above anything on earth. Only when a people encourage each other to stand out in this way will they "appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). (Reflections)

This planet is transitory: when the day of the Lord comes like a thief, "the earth and its works will be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10). Yet something in us longs for the eternal, for that which will not pass away. We cannot satisfy this longing through earthly accomplishments, naming buildings and land after ourselves, building corporate empires, collecting valued possessions, or other forms of human endeavor, because all of these things are destined to disappear.□□When we invite Christ to manifest His life in and through us, when we represent the Lord Jesus in our spheres of influence and

encourage others to know Him better, we are investing in something that will last forever. We cannot take our earthly possessions with us, but according to the gospel, we can take people with us. (Reflections)

The value system that emerges from the pages of Scripture tells us that true wealth does not consist in material acquisition or worldly power, but in the relationships we build with believers and unbelievers in the name of Christ. The apostle Paul evidently had few possessions, but he was a rich man because he made lasting spiritual investments in people. He knew that when people are delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13), new lives are created that endure forever. (Reflections)

If we really want to grow in the joy of following Christ, we must be willing to take the risks of obeying His command to love God first and foremost, and His new command to love others even as He loved us (John 13:34). Risk taking is involved because this appears to be the path of sacrifice and self-denial. But the Scriptures tell us again and again that it is ultimately the path to a freedom, fulfillment, and joy that cannot be known by those who live by the principle of self for self rather than self for others. (Reflections)

Just as none of our actions will make God love us more, it is equally true that there is nothing we can think, say, or do that will make God love us less than He does (Rom. 5:6-10). (Reflections)

Spiritual growth is accomplished by Christ's life in us, not by our own attempts to create life. Our responsibility is to walk in the power of the Spirit and not in dependence on the flesh (Gal. 2:20; 5:16-25). (Reflections)

The focus of the Christian life should not be deeds and actions, but a relationship; it is not centered on a product, but on a Person. It is a matter of abiding in Christ Jesus (John 15:1-10) rather than fulfilling a set of religious formulae. (Reflections)

Many of us are inclined to base our identity and worth in earthly accomplishments, but this is too fragile and shallow a foundation. Our true worth and identity is found in Christ, not in the fleeting recognition of men. (Reflections)

Our view of profit and loss is shaped by the value system we embrace. Those who hold a temporal value system will give themselves to the things the world declares to be important, while those who are committed to the eternal value system of Scripture will give their lives in exchange for the things God declares to be important. There is a radical difference between the two, "for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). (Reflections)

Our Lord spoke often about rewards and told us that there is nothing wrong with the desire for profit or gain. But He warned that if the focus of our lives is on the temporal, we will sell ourselves short and miss out on eternal gain. "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26; Mark 8:36). If, on the other hand, the focus of our lives is on the eternal, we will gain a reward that will endure forever while we trust God to meet our temporal needs (Matt. 6:19-34). (Reflections)

Telescopic photographs of the sun often reveal massive areas on the solar photosphere called sunspots. These are temporary cool regions that appear dark by contrast against the hotter photosphere that surrounds them. But if we could see a sunspot by itself, it would actually be brilliant. In the same way, our love for others should shine except when compared with our love for the Lord Christ. Although we have not yet seen Jesus, we can love Him and hope in Him who first loved us and delivered Himself up for us. (Reflections)

Our highest calling is to grow in our knowledge of Christ and to make Him known to others. If any person, position, or possession is elevated above the Lord Jesus in our minds and affections, we will be unable to fulfill this great calling. Instead, we will sell ourselves cheaply for the empty promises of a fleeting world. (Reflections)

"He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."--  
Jim Eliot

The distance between the righteousness that is achieved by human efforts and the righteousness that God requires is like the distance between heaven and earth. The religions of the world tell us that through disciplines like meditation, devotional service, and right living, it is possible to attain salvation or enlightenment. Christianity is unique in its teaching that a relationship with the infinite and personal God is made possible by His gift and not by our works. (Reflections)

There is a subtle tendency among many students of the Word to be more interested in an intellectual knowledge *about* God than in a personal knowledge *of* God. The former is important, but God wants us to love Him with our hearts and our souls as well as our minds (Matt. 22:37). (Reflections)

What is the purpose of *your* life on this planet? Do you have an unchanging reason for being, a purpose that transcends the seasons and circumstances of life? I submit that if the most significant component of your purpose is not a growing knowledge of the person and character of God, your answer to the question, Why am I here? will be at variance with a biblical view of life. (Reflections)

True spirituality is not concerned with rules, regulations, and rituals, but with the person of Christ Jesus. The focus of Scripture is not on religion, but on a relationship. (Reflections)

Our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is the basis for our experiencing the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. His divine power gives us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) when we surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit. This includes the power to endure suffering for Christ's sake, which the Scriptures assure us will occur in the lives of those who want to be more like Him. But we are also assured that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18). (Reflections)

The legalist strives in the efforts of the flesh to attain a human standard of righteousness. Legalism seeks to quantify spirituality into a measurable product. In this way, it produces the complacency of procedures and practices rather than the ever-challenging dynamic of pursuing the Person of Christ. (Reflections)

Paul never allowed himself to be satisfied with the status quo in his walk with God, though he would have been tempted to do so if he put his eyes on people rather than the Lord. Instead, he learned the life-changing secret of not comparing himself with others, but only with Christ. (Reflections)

The apostle avoided the morass of complacency and self-satisfaction through his understanding of the spiritual life as a process that leads ever higher and deeper in the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of all things in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible (Col. 1:16-17). In his singlemindedness ("one thing I do"), he concentrated on the goal of growing conformity to Christ. (Reflections)

The world's agenda burdens us with a multiplicity of worries and "desires for other things" (Mark 4:19) that can never satisfy the spiritual hunger of the human heart. But our calling is higher than this. Our Lord wants us to lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, so that we can run with endurance the race that is set before us as we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (Heb. 12:1-2). (Reflections)

We must face today as children of tomorrow. We must meet the uncertainties of this world with the certainty of the world to come. (A. W. Tozer)

All of us have said and done things we wish we could undo or redo. In varying degrees, we have also experienced the pains of mistreatment and rejection. Though we cannot change the past, we can change our understanding of the past as we embrace the unconditional love of Christ

who blesses us with forgiveness, healing, and restoration. The Scriptures exhort us to overcome the bondage of the past by living in the light of the future to which we have been called. The past is inalterable, but our lives in the present have a direct bearing on the quality of eternity. (Reflections)

If we applied the same zeal in our walk with the Lord that we use in our sports and hobbies, many of us would be farther along the course. It takes time and discipline to "run with endurance the race that is set before us," but this discipline must be set in a context of dependence upon the Spirit of Christ who indwells us and enables us to run in His victory. (Reflections)

Product oriented believers tend to quantify spirituality in terms of external sets of do's and don'ts that may at best be remotely related to the royal law of loving God and others (Jas. 2:8). Process oriented believers recognize that relationships precede everything else in life, and take the risk of committing themselves to quality rather than quantity. They stay in the process of the race set before them by running according to the God-given rules (2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Cor. 9:24-27) of dependence (the divine sovereignty side of the coin) and discipline (the human responsibility side of the coin). (Reflections)

All of us have discovered how easy it is to unlearn spiritual truth. But before we can move on to greater heights in our Christian journey, we must have a firm grasp of the basics, not only in our understanding, but also in our application. We were never meant to walk this path alone--it requires both *encouragement and accountability* to stay in the process. If these are missing ingredients in your life, prayerfully seek them out. (Reflections)

As people who have become children of God through faith in His Son, we have been called to live in such a way that our lives cannot be explained in ordinary terms. By living in dependence upon His enabling grace, the quality of our character and conduct should be such that Christ is seen in us with greater clarity as the years go by. (Reflections)

Spiritual truth becomes more real and evident when it is personally fleshed out in the character and conduct of someone we know. Just as in Jesus, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), so we also become incarnations of the Word to the degree that we allow Christ to live His life in and through us. All of us need models whose lives encourage and challenge us to become more than we otherwise might have been. (Reflections)

The adversary tempts us to the extremes: the fetters of self-mortification in the name of religion and of self-indulgence in the name of freedom please him equally. The only path to true liberty is along the road that leads to the cross of Christ. (Reflections)

If any of us could be transported to heaven for even a five minute visit, we would never be the same after our return to earth. For the first time, we would have a true perspective on the frailty and brevity of life on earth and the absurdity of giving our hearts to things that will not last. (Reflections)

It is want of faith that makes us opt for earthly rather than heavenly treasure. If we really believed in celestial treasures, who among us would be so stupid as to buy gold? We just do not believe. Heaven is a dream, a religious fantasy which we affirm because we are orthodox. If people believed in heaven, they would spend their time preparing for permanent residence there. But nobody does. (John White)

Every child of God has a dual citizenship on earth and in heaven, but our greatest allegiance must be to our real fatherland which is heaven. Each of us is a citizen of an earthly country, but in comparison to our heavenly citizenship, we are really resident aliens who are temporarily dwelling in a foreign land. (Reflections)

Just as it is easier to walk by sight rather than faith, it is also easy to forget that we are sojourners and aliens on earth. Our grasp of this issue can make the difference between a Lot who chose the world and eventually lost everything, and an Abraham who chose God's portion for him, because he desired a better country (Heb. 11:9-10, 13, 16). When we forget our real citizenship, we work harder for our comfort than we do for our character. (Reflections)

What do you crave more than anything else? What do you long for and dream about? What is your value system, and is it consistent with your true citizenship? We will either seek first the satisfaction of our own appetites and desires or we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. There will always be a struggle, but we cannot have it both ways. (Reflections)

We must remember our citizenship and live in accordance with it. As we allow Scripture to define us and remind us that we are pilgrims and aliens on this earth (Heb. 11:13; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11), we will begin to seek "the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). The difference between a temporal and an eternal perspective is the difference between the primary pursuit of the things that are on earth and the things that are above. (Reflections)

The return of Christ is always presented in the New Testament as a purifying hope. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). To walk in wisdom, we must remember our real citizenship

and focus on Him whose promised return is as certain as tomorrow. (Reflections)

The days of the years of our lives are few, and swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not time enough to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of. (A. W. Tozer)

We were meant for far more than this creation can offer. God has planted deep longings within us, and if we are wise, we will allow these to become magnets that draw our hearts to the only realm in which these longings will be satisfied. (Reflections)

Those who trust in Christ have a source of stability that transcends the afflictions, uncertainties, adversities, sorrows, and disappointments of earthly life. From one point of view, our lives are held together by the most gossamer of threads. But when we view ourselves as God's beloved children, we understand that nothing in all creation can separate us from His love in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39). (Reflections)

People usually turn to possessions, pleasure, prestige, popularity, promotion, power, and performance as sources of joy in life. But Paul found his joy in relationships: first with the Lord, and then with people. There is always a price to pay in cultivating relationships--the risk of rejection, the trauma of transparency, the inevitable misunderstandings, the sometimes draining demands, the love that may not be reciprocated, the confidences that are betrayed, the burdens that must be shared--but the rewards are ultimately worth the price. This is especially so when we are liberated to love and serve others unconditionally through the understanding that our identity and worth is based on who Christ says we are, and not on people's assessment of us. (Reflections)

We bring nothing into this world, and we can take nothing material out of it. But if we are investing in the lives of people, our investments will accrue dividends forever, since people were made in the image of God to inhabit eternity. (Reflections)

Biblical servanthood can be expressed in a variety of ways. It is seen in a concern for other people as individuals, e.g., praying for them by name. It is communicated in helping with another's physical or emotional needs. It is visible in a real concern for the spiritual condition of others. It is manifested in words that convey love and encouragement. And it is demonstrated in a gracious and gentle correcting of those who are in error. (Reflections)

Few of us will achieve fame in this world, and even if we do, it quickly fades away. But fame with God--to be known and approved by Him--is the hope of every believer and will last forever. (Reflections)

A wise person finds more joy in relationships than in things. Both the Old and the New Testaments resonate with this theme, and repeatedly tell us that a vital vertical relationship with the Lord is the key to quality horizontal relationships with others. (Reflections)

The pursuit of happiness is bound up with circumstances, but the joyful fruit of the Spirit transcends the ever-changing circumstances of life (see Hab. 3:17-19). (Reflections)

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:6-7). These words are reminiscent of our Lord's exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount to avoid all forms of anxiety by depending upon God as the supplier of our needs (Matt. 6:25-34). Notice the contrast between being anxious for nothing and praying about everything. We often find ourselves praying about a few things and worrying about many, thinking that our problems are either too small or too great for God. But our Father is interested in all our concerns, and tells us to cast our burdens upon Him, and He will sustain us (Ps. 55:22). When we fail to pray about our problems, we carry burdens we were never meant to bear alone. (Reflections)

We approach our problems by sight or by faith. When we approach them by sight, our God tends to be small and our problems large; when we approach them by faith, they no longer overwhelm us because we recognize the greatness and care of God. (Reflections)

From a biblical perspective, it is foolish and sinful to wallow in worry. This is because worry stems from a lack of trust in the care and control of God. The autonomous mentality that we can best look after ourselves and control our own destinies is folly. If we want to move in the direction of wisdom, we must abandon the illusion of self-sufficiency and embrace the reality of God's sufficiency. (Reflections)

When your mind wanders, what concepts does it follow? What thoughts do you pursue during neutral times like standing in lines and waiting at red lights or during routine times like getting dressed or going to sleep? Few of us really monitor our thought lives, but if we did, we would probably be surprised at the proportion of negative, critical, and self-serving ideas that run unchecked through our minds. Yet the Scriptures tell us that our thought lives are as crucial as our outward lives; belief is as important as behavior, and attitudes are as significant as actions. (Reflections)

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us that "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" can transmute our anxieties into the peace of God. Philippians 4:8 adds a second key to overcoming worry and anxiety, and this is the practice of dwelling not on the negative, but on that which is true, honorable, right, pure, beautiful, of good repute, excellent, and praiseworthy. For most of us, this does not come naturally; it is a skill we must gradually develop. With few exceptions, our worries concern things that are untrue, cannot be changed, or will never happen. Instead, Scripture calls us to cultivate the skill of seeing life from heaven's side, which requires the process of renewing the mind described in Romans 12:1-2 (cf. Ps. 19:7-9). (Reflections)

With verse 9, Paul makes the transition from attitude to action, and this, along with prayer and a positive thought life, is the third biblical way to overcome anxiety. Worry can paralyze us into inactivity, and this in turn can increase our level of anxiety, and so on in a vicious circle. The worst thing we can do about an unpleasant task that must be completed, whether it is a term paper or a tax return, is to put it off. When we do this, our foreboding soars as the due date approaches. The old motto, "procrastination is the thief of time" still rings true, and prudence tells us that action can overcome anxiety. (Reflections)

In His sovereign love, God never places believers in situations where they must fail (1 Cor. 10:13); there may be pain, but this is a key to being conformed to the image of Christ who "learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). We must be more committed to trusting God than to avoiding pain. A strategy of pain avoidance in relationships and circumstances always leads away from personal and spiritual growth. C. S. Lewis observed in The Four Loves that "The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell." (Reflections)

"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (Philippians 4:12). As Paul developed a personal history of God's ways and works in his life, he was initiated in the secret of contentment. By walking with Christ, he learned to treasure the process of life by trusting the Person of God. Most people never learn this secret because they value the products of life and put their trust in possessions and performance. (Reflections)

Christ promised that He would never desert us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5), but He did not promise that we would enjoy material prosperity or freedom from pain. If we look back to the days of our humble means, we may discover that the times when we had little were actually more rich and rewarding than the times of prosperity. Increasing wealth offers no

assurance of increasing contentment; in some cases, it can diminish contentment and tax our ability to walk by faith. (Reflections)

The greatest threat to contentment is comparing ourselves with those who appear to be better off than we are. When we dwell on the thought that a friend is doing better in business, has a better family situation, car, home, or even ministry, it is impossible for us to be content. Instead of comparing with others, Paul tells us to focus only on Christ. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13). He realized that his sufficiency was in Christ alone. Like Paul, we must look to our King to give us the power of contentment whether we face poverty or prosperity. (Reflections)

God alone is the Source of "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift" (Jas. 1:17). While the Lord uses a number of means to accomplish His purposes, we must be wise enough to distinguish the means from the Source. As we do this, we will center our dependence on God rather than people, and this will liberate us to serve rather than manipulate others. (Reflections)

Since we cannot outgive God, no follower of Christ will ever become destitute by giving to His work (see 2 Cor. 9:7-11). He is the Source of all that we have, and when we give to the cause of Christ, we are really acknowledging His ownership and our stewardship. (Reflections)

We have access to more information and technological wizardry and greater vehicles for communication, transportation, and entertainment than would have been dreamed possible only a few decades ago. Nothing in the history of the planet even approximates the things we regard as routine. Yet a good case can be made that there has never been such a wholesale disregard for the practice and propagation of wisdom as there is in our increasingly secularized civilization. Few people think at all about the larger issues of life, but instead flow along without resistance with the current of a culture that promotes the money, sex, and power of "the good life" while virtually ignoring the real questions of the meaning and purpose of it all. As Peter Kreeft put it, "When ultimate ends disappear, toys remain." (Reflections)

Reflection on the psalms is an antidote to the spirit of our age. The psalms are a clarion call to live our transient lives on earth in the light of eternity. Because God has planted eternity in our hearts (Eccles. 3:11), we were never meant to feel completely at home in this world. (Reflections)

Psalms 90:12 tells us that a growing awareness of the brevity of our earthly sojourn is actually an indispensable component for the attainment of wisdom: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom." The better we understand that we are pilgrims and aliens on this planet, the more likely our value system will treasure the

eternal over the temporal. This is the wisdom of conforming our wants to reality instead of the illusions promoted by the world system. (Reflections)

We cannot keep score by two systems. Each day we must make the decision to be defined by the eternal, or by default we will allow ourselves to be defined by the temporal. It is only when the focus of our hearts is on the eternal that our work in the temporal arena will endure, because it will be done for Christ rather than for men (Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23). (Reflections)

There is no higher calling than to love and worship the infinite and personal God of creation and redemption. A. W. Tozer observed that what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Our image of God shapes our spiritual direction and future, and is forged in the times we spend in communion with Him. In complete contrast to the world, God's economy measures greatness not in terms of ability or accomplishments, but in the vitality and integrity of a person's walk with the Lord. King David was a gifted man who was rich in achievements, yet the key to his greatness did not lay in these, but in his choice to give his heart wholly to God. In the midst of the struggles he faced, he took time to meditate and stretch his vision of the living God, and this provided him with a renewed perspective about the things that really matter. (Reflections)

If we unthinkingly take life for granted and lose our sense of wonder at God and His creation, our capacity to worship will atrophy. David's ongoing amazement and wonder is captured in Psalm 139, a beautiful meditation on the knowledge, presence, power, and holiness of the Ruler of all creation. (Reflections)

"O Lord, You have searched me and known me." As he reflects on the omniscience of God, David is overwhelmed by the truth that God has thoroughly exposed him and intimately knows him. The same is true of us: God has "mined" us to the depths of our being, and His knowledge besieges us all around ("Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me"). He knows our actions, our words, our thoughts, and our motives. Such knowledge is overwhelming, not only because it is beyond our comprehension, but also because it exposes all our pretences. Yet it is comforting to know that there no need of pretence before God; He knows us through and through, including our darkest thoughts and deeds, and still loves us unconditionally. (Reflections)

"I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, and my soul knows it very well." Psalm 139:13-18 portrays the omnipotence of the Creator by a poetical description of the wonder of human birth. What artist would create his magnum opus in total darkness? Yet God wove us together with all our variegated colors in

the hiddenness of the womb ("the depths of the earth"). He formed us in all our complexity to be a unity of body, soul, and spirit with all our capacities for thought, communication, morality, and aspiration. His eyes saw our embryos and He appointed all the days that were ordained for us on this planet. The all-powerful Lord of creation is worthy of all worship and trust, since nothing is too difficult for Him (Jer. 32:17; Luke 1:37). (Reflections)

The world is always ready to define us in terms of our relative position, power, performance, or possessions. But the wisdom of the Word tells us to let God, not the world, define us. Our greatest source of dignity and worth is found in our relationship to the infinite-personal Creator of the heavens and earth. We are His by virtue of creation and redemption, and in Christ we are the special objects of His attention and affection. (Reflections)

If sheep are not led to good water, they will seek to satisfy their thirst in polluted and stagnant sources. On a spiritual level, we are blessed if we thirst for the living water that the Good Shepherd wants us to drink. "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38; 4:10, 13-14). We should pray for the grace to thirst more deeply for this water of life and righteousness. Jeremiah affirmed that no substitute for the living water will satisfy the deepest longings of our heart: "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). If any person, pursuit, or passion other than the Lord Jesus is the primary focus of your heart, you will not know the satisfaction He invites us to find in Him. (Reflections)

"Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6). With these words, David affirms that because he belongs to God's flock, the goodness and loyal love of the Lord will always be his portion. There will be times when our circumstances will threaten our willingness to make this affirmation with the psalmist. Even under the best care, the sheep can think they are being led down blind alleys or through places that seem as dark as night. But when we look at the outcome of the Lord's leading in the lives of people like Abraham, Joseph, and Job, we discover that in His sovereign love, God brings eventual good out of the apparent chaos for those who have chosen to be in His care. We must never let our circumstances determine our view of God's character or care. The good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:11; 1 John 3:16) will not abandon us, but will perfect the good work He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6). He tells us to keep our eyes on Him, not our problems, and to show His goodness and mercy to others. (Reflections)

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). Those who have become members of God's flock through faith in Christ Jesus have already entered into eternal life, because eternal life is knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3; cf. 5:24). His presence will be our joy forever, and we should become accustomed to it by practicing His presence during the years of our earthly sojourn. (Reflections)

As believers in Christ, our abundance and security rests in Him and not in our earthly possessions. We must not make the mistake of putting our hope in savings, investments, and material goods. "For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens" (Prov. 23:5). When we recognize that God alone is our portion and our inheritance, we will look beyond our earthly means of provision to Him as our true Source of provision. And when we discover that the world's treasures and pleasures are as nothing compared to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7-11), we will be content with God's level of material provision because of the beauty and richness of our spiritual heritage. (Reflections)

In the perfect happiness of heaven nothing more will remain to be desired; in the full enjoyment of God man will obtain whatever he has desired in other things. (Thomas Aquinas)

God is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6), but we will not enter into the fullness of that reward until we stand before Him. The deepest desire of our heart should be to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:21, NKJV). Until that time, we must confess that we are strangers and exiles on the earth and grow strong enough in faith to welcome God's promises from a distance (Heb. 11:13). Like Asaph in Psalm 73, we must repent of the bitterness of heart that comes from putting our hope in anything other than the goodness and promises of God. (Reflections)

The focus of your heart will define and direct you more than any other thing. If your longing is for the things the world declares to be important, you will treat the temporal as eternal and the eternal as temporal. The Lord Jesus told us "that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). But if the nearness of God is your good (Psalm 73:28), you will never be disappointed. (Reflections)

The Word is a moral mirror that exposes the true character of the soul (Jas. 1:23-25). David recognized his need for forgiveness not only from obvious sins, but also for flaws too subtle for him to see (Psalm 19:12-13). Even while we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1:7). (Reflections)

One characteristic of spiritual growth is a growing awareness of both the holiness of God and the destructiveness of sin. The maturing believer

understands that regular exposure to the light of revelation, along with a commitment to respond to the illuminating and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, is not optional but essential to personal and spiritual vitality. (Reflections)

Human nature is a web of contradictions: we are at once the grandeur and degradation of the created order; we bear the image of God, but we are ensnared in trespasses and sins; we are capable of harnessing the forces of nature, but unable to rule our tongue; we are the most wonderful and creative beings on this planet, but the most violent, cruel, and contemptible of earth's inhabitants. (Reflections)

Pascal described the dignity and puniness of man in these words: "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this." (Reflections)

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?" From the time David wrote those words until the invention of the telescope in the early seventeenth century, only a few thousand stars were visible to the unaided eye, and the universe appeared far less impressive than we now know it to be. Even until the second decade of our century, it was thought that the Milky Way galaxy was synonymous with the universe. Now this alone would be awesome in its scope, since our spiral galaxy contains over two hundred billion stars and extends to a diameter of 100,000 light years (remember that a light second is over 186,000 miles; light from the sun to the earth traverses a distance of about 93 million miles in eight seconds). But more recent developments in astronomy have revealed that our galaxy is a member of a local cluster of some twenty galaxies, and that this local cluster is but one member of a massive supercluster of thousands of galaxies. So many of these superclusters are known to exist that the number of galaxies is estimated to be in the hundreds of billions. What is man, indeed! The God who created these stars and calls them all by name (Isa. 40:26) is unimaginably awesome; His wisdom, beauty, power, and dominion are beyond human comprehension. And yet He has deigned to seek intimacy with the people on this puny planet and has given them great dignity and destiny: "Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and crown him with glory and majesty" (Psalm 8:5). While these words are applicable to all people, they find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:6-8). (Reflections)

Our perspective on life, whether temporal or eternal, will determine the set of rules by which we play, the standards and character we pursue, the source of our hope, and the difference between and obedience and disobedience to God's precepts and principles. (Reflections)

Let the nearness of God be your good (Psalm 73:28) and cultivate intimacy with Him. This cannot be done apart from the discipline of regular time with the Lord in the Word and prayer, but I have never heard anyone regret making this investment. When we seek Him first, He gives us the desires of our heart because our desires become conformed to His. (Reflections)

Unreservedly give all your plans, your dreams, your hopes, and your desires to the Lord (cf. Prov. 16:3). The only things that will really be yours are the things you have freely given to God. In the long run, you will be unable to keep the things you have held back from Christ (Luke 9:23-24). (Reflections)

God's timing is almost never our own, and because of this, we grow impatient, anxious, and frustrated with the adversities of life. But if we trust His character, we must also trust His timing. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). (Reflections)

Martin Luther once held a rose in his hand and said, "'Tis a magnificent work of God: could a man make but one such rose as this, he would be thought worthy of all honor, but the gifts of God lose their value in our eyes, from their very infinity." It was also Luther who said, "Nothing ages more quickly than gratitude." (Reflections)

The spiritual disease of taking grace for granted and responding with ingratitude to the riches of God's kindnesses may be reaching epidemic proportions in our time. Few believers begin the day with a sense of wonder at the lovingkindness of God, gratitude for their health, amazement at the undeserved blessings they have received, or anticipation of another opportunity to love and serve God and others. Instead, we are more inclined to murmur and complain over the things we do not possess rather than stand in awe at the good things bestowed upon us by the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17). (Reflections)

Since it is impossible to give thanks and complain at the same time, the antidote for our malaise is a heart of gratitude cultivated by a regular routine of remembering the history of God's redemptive acts in our lives. "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting. . . . Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things; and consider the lovingkindnesses of the Lord" (Psalm 107:1, 43). (Reflections)

To those who are lost, Christ offers Himself as the way of life; to those who are hungry, the bread of life; to those who are thirsty, the water of life; and to those who are exhausted, the rest that can be found only in Him. (Reflections)

It takes, on the average, about three years of daily Scripture meditation to bring about enough change in a person's thought patterns and behavior to produce statistically superior mental health and happiness. (Paul Meier)

O God, I know that if I do not love Thee with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength, I shall love something else with all my heart and mind and soul and strength. Grant that putting Thee first in all my lovings I may be liberated from all lesser loves and loyalties, and have Thee as my first love, my chiefest good and my final joy. (George Appleton)

Any good which takes first place in our hearts is an idol if it is not the Supreme Good, the living God. We were created to have a relationship with Him, and no other person, possession, or position will satisfy our deepest longings. (Reflections)

Over and over again, the Scriptures exhort us to approach God with praise and gratitude for the many benefits He has bestowed upon us. But our natural tendency is to forget what He has done in our lives and to focus instead on our problems, pains, and disappointments. When this happens, we view God in terms of our circumstances instead of viewing our circumstances in terms of His character. We become proud and autonomous (see Deut. 8:12-14, 17-18; 2 Chron. 32:25) or angry and embittered because we have forgotten that we lay hold of our hope through faith and patience (see Rom. 15:4; Heb. 6:10-11, 18-19; 10:35-36). (Reflections)

In contrast to humans who nurse grievances and are quick to quarrel but slow to forgive, "God, infinitely wronged, not only tempers wrath but tempers justice—though at what cost to Himself, only the New Testament would reveal" (Derek Kidner).

Thanks be to Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which Thou hast given us; for all the pains and insults which Thou hast borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may we know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly; for Thine own sake. (St. Richard of Chichester)

Have you ever seen another person grow in character and depth in times of apparent success? It would be so much simpler if having things go "our way" was also beneficial to us in the long run, but because of self-centeredness and shortsightedness, this is rarely the case. Until the Lord returns, we will continue to learn and grow more through setbacks and

failures than through success as the world defines it. Listen to the observations of a man who had enjoyed an eminently successful career in the eyes of his peers: "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained." (Malcolm Muggeridge)

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1-2). The Old Testament poets had far less knowledge about the person and promises of God than we enjoy through the fullness of New Testament revelation. As C. S. Lewis put it, "They did not know that He offered them eternal joy; still less that He would die to win it for them." Yet the longing they express for Him is rarely found among believers today; this kind of spiritual thirst, so necessary to true discipleship, is usually dulled by the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things (Mark 4:19). (Reflections)

It is simplistic and unbiblical to think that by coming to Christ, we will be protected from pain and adversity in this life. People are often prompted to come to Him for all the wrong reasons--to have a better marriage, a better career, financial prosperity, happiness, good health, etc. But Christianity is not a religion of solutions; it is a relationship with the Savior. It is not a conquering of our problems, but a commitment to a Person. The Lord calls us to pursue Him apart from any benefits He may provide. We must love the Giver for Himself, and not for His gifts, because all these pale in comparison to knowing Him, the personal Source of every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift (Jas. 1:17). (Reflections)

The psalmist understood this and knew that the sovereign God can use even affliction as an instrument of His grace. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes. I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me" (Psalm 119:67, 71, 75). Without a biblical perspective, no one could make such affirmations. When we suffer, we will either view our circumstances in the light of God's character and promises, or we will view God's character and promises in the light of our circumstances. The former perspective is biblical and can make us better people; the latter perspective is more typical and can make us bitter people. (Reflections)

We must come to the point where we are willing to admit two truths about ourselves: (1) although we think we do, we do not really know what our best interests are, and (2) even if we did, we could not achieve them on our own. Only an omniscient, loving, and sovereign God knows and wants what is truly best for us and is capable of bringing it about. The Scriptures assure God's children of purpose and hope. We will not grasp most of them in this life, but there are wise and loving purposes behind the things we do not understand. Our task is to set our hope solely on God's character and promises. "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). (Reflections)

We are shaped by what we love. If you want to know what a person is like, find out what he loves and longs for above all else. David's deepest longing was the key to his character. "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). (Reflections)

The Word of God calls us to view the world and all of life from a divine rather than a human perspective. Our final integration point and source of meaning is upward, not downward, heavenly, not earthly, the Creator, not the cosmos. The world would define us by default; do nothing, and it will fill your eyes and ears with its system of values. The Word will only define us by discipline; we must choose to sit under its daily tutelage, or our minds will never be renewed and transformed by eternal values. (Reflections)

The greatest human need is for that which we do not deserve and can never earn--the grace of God. When we acknowledge our desperate need for God's grace, this is itself an evidence of His grace in our lives, since the natural pull of the flesh is toward the arrogance of autonomy. We would be wise to begin each day by asking to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and choosing to walk in the power of His Spirit. (Reflections)

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of the imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose--and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy of that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. (William Temple)

When we contemplate the gracefulness of a flower or the grandeur of a tree, we properly respond with aesthetic admiration. Similarly, we respond to our pets with personal affection, and at times to other people with self-giving love. If nature is worthy of admiration, animals of

affection, and human beings of sacrificial love, how then should we respond to the infinite and personal Author of all biological and spiritual life? The biblical answer is clear--God alone is worthy of worship. Blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever belong to the Creator and Redeemer (Rev. 5:13), and every tongue in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, including all who have rebelled against Him, will confess this to be so (Phil. 2:10-11). (Reflections)

We were born to worship God. In his book, *Desiring God*, John Piper modifies the Shorter Catechism's answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" For him, the chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever. We honor God most when His glory becomes our greatest pleasure; we worship God best when we pursue our joy in Him above all. (Reflections)

All of us need the security of unconditional love and acceptance, and this is precisely what we discover in Christ. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more, and nothing we can do will make Him love us less (see Rom. 8:35, 38-39). Our prayer as believers in Christ should not be that we have more of Him, but that He has more of us. (Reflections)

Because He is faithful, God's plans and promises for us will never waver. There is no real security in people, possessions, or position; sooner or later, all of these will let us down. Our only true security is in the unchanging character and promises of the Lord. (Reflections)

God's loyal love and faithfulness should be the cause of childlike wonder and awe, but for most believers, these have become religious platitudes, mere words that no longer grip their hearts or imaginations. It is easy to lose our first love and forget what we were before we knew Christ and what we would be without Him. Ask God for the grace to make you a worshipper; one who is amazed by His steadfast love and astonished by His faithfulness. Nourish your heart on high thoughts of God through devotional reading of the Scriptures, and worship Him in Spirit and truth. (Reflections)

We are in desperate need of the grace of forgiveness, not only because of the slavery and self-destructiveness of sin, but also because it severs us from fellowship with the personal Source of life, light, and love. (Reflections)

When freedom from the burden of guilt is so readily available, why do we wallow in our stubbornness and foolish pride? The believer who has broken fellowship with God will not know the "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17) that comes with kingdom living. Sin is utterly monotonous, but God's deliverance is infinitely creative. (Reflections)

If we are wise, we will not harbor unconfessed sin and allow it to fester, but we will respond quickly to the loving conviction of the Holy Spirit. This is the thought in verses 8-9. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you" (cf. Prov. 26:3). God wants to treat us as beloved children who respond to His words, but if we try to run ahead like a spirited horse or lag behind like a stubborn mule, He will use firmer measures to get our attention. But whenever God disciplines us, it is always for our good, that we may share His holiness and enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:10-11). (Reflections)

John Ruskin believed that humility is the test of true greatness. He observed that "Really great men have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them." The wisdom literature of the Bible, with its emphasis on humility and the fear of the Lord, would concur. The most prominent characteristic of biblical wisdom is the attitude of radical dependence upon the Lord which was epitomized in Jesus' statement that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). By contrast, the fool is characterized by the arrogant attitude of autonomy that was captured in the last couplet of William Ernest Henley's poem, "Invictus": "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." The delusion in this sentiment is that we aren't the masters of even the next hour, let alone the next year or decade! I have grown fond of the saying, "If you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans." (Reflections)

The tragedy of idolatry is that we ultimately become conformed to the things we worship. "Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them" (Psalm 115:8). When we worship the creation rather than the Creator, we degrade and dehumanize ourselves, because our final point of identification becomes finite and temporal, not infinite and eternal. But we will serve and worship something; we cannot live with a meaning vacuum. The choice is not whether we will worship, but what we will worship. "And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). (Reflections)

We are always tempted to trust in the gods that seem to work. As followers of Christ, we may give lip service to our trust in God, but when our circumstances become thorny, we often trust in our own performance or in the uncertain promises of people. Yet it is during difficult times that we most need to trust in the Lord--we honor Him most when we cling to His character and promises in times of darkness. (Reflections)

The God of the Bible is the only worthy object of our ultimate allegiance. Because He is personal, He cares for us; because of His love and goodness,

He wants what is best for us; because He is infinite and sovereign, He can accomplish His purposes for our lives. But He will not violate our unwillingness—we must trust Him completely and allow Him to reign in our hearts. (Reflections)

There are many occasions when we are tempted to sit in judgment of God because of a struggle with adverse circumstances in our own lives or in the lives of others. There are other times when we deceive ourselves into thinking that we can get away with acts we know were wrong since there were no apparent consequences. And there are settings in which we act as though religious activities and observances automatically put us in good stead with our Creator. The common element in all these cases is that we are judging God according to our standards, forgetting that it is God who will judge us according to His standards. (Reflections)

We must worship the God who is, not the God we want. (Reflections)

It is so much easier to reduce spirituality to a set of overt activities than to cultivate a right heart toward God. God is far more interested in relationship than in ritual, in character than in commotion, in being than in doing. (Reflections)

Since God has no needs, the only thing we can give Him is ourselves in trusting acknowledgement of His goodness toward us. (Reflections)

The sacrifice of thanksgiving honors God because it means that we affirm that God is good (see Heb. 13:15), even when our circumstances tempt us to think otherwise. (Reflections)

The reason people break God's commands is that they have needs they perceive are not being met by God, so they take matters into their own hands. At the point when we think God is not being good to us, we will respond in disobedience. Obedience depends on trust, and trust depends on perspective; if we see things clearly enough to realize that God's will for His children is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2), we will give Him thanks in every circumstance and acknowledge His goodness. (Reflections)

"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). It is a serious miscalculation to think that we can disobey our Lord without any consequences. It is easy to lip-synch the words in the choir of life, but each of us will someday have to sing solo before God. Those who have trusted in Christ will not face a judgment of condemnation, because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). Nevertheless, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1

Cor. 3:10-15). At the judgment seat of Christ, believers will not face the wrath of God, because this was endured by the Lamb of God. But they will give an account before God of how they invested the time, abilities, possessions, and opportunities with which they were entrusted during their earthly sojourn. While entrance into heaven is a matter of grace and not works, the Scriptures affirm that the quality of heavenly existence is based on the quality of our lives on earth. (Reflections)

The world's purest gold is only dung without Christ. But with Christ, the basest metal is transformed into the purest gold. The hopes of alchemy can come true, but on a spiritual level, not a chemical one. There is a 'philosophers stone' that transmutes all things into gold. Its name is Christ. With him, poverty is riches, weakness is power, suffering is joy, to be despised is glory. Without him, riches are poverty, power is impotence, happiness is misery, glory is despised. (Peter Kreeft)

Once we have committed our lives to Christ, there should be no turning back--indeed, if we think about it, there is nothing of real and lasting substance to which we can turn apart from Him. In spite of this truth, there is an epidemic of believers who drop out of the race during their middle years. Many begin well, but end poorly. (Reflections)

To stay the course we need the stark realization that without utter dependence on our God, we will fail. Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, although these may be involved, but against the entrapments and entanglements of the world, the devices and desires of the flesh, and the schemes and seductions of the devil. Unless we find our life and power in Christ and walk in love and obedience to Him, we will be no match for our adversaries and we will be impotent to accomplish anything of eternal value. (Reflections)

It is wise to practice the careful cultivation of a spiritual memory. In each of our lives, the Lord carves benchmarks and reminders of His gracious care, provision, and wisdom. We would do well to "forget none of His benefits" (Psalm 103:2); when we stop reviewing them, they pass out of memory, and we take grace for granted and sleep with the illusion that we got where we are on our own. Nothing ages more quickly than gratitude, because the flesh cries for independence and spurns dependence upon God. Wisdom would teach us to acknowledge God in all our ways and to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18), from the small to the great. (Reflections)

Scripture stresses the public acknowledgement of the benefits and the greatness of the Lord in our lives. The blessings we receive from God are not ends in themselves, but are given to us in order to be blessings to others. The more we receive from His hand, the more we must give, and this includes truth as well as treasure. (Reflections)

We need a growing sense of wonder and amazement at the goodness, truth, beauty, and love of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The bigger your God, the smaller your problems; the smaller your God, the bigger your problems. Your vision of God will grow in proportion to your knowledge of Him, and this knowledge is not only propositional; it is personal. How do you get to know Him better? The same way you develop intimacy with other people: time together, oneness of purpose, openness, honesty, teachability, and sacrificial love. (Reflections)

In his books, Francis Schaeffer coined the phrase, "nature eats up grace." What he meant is that when people give autonomy to the natural order by separating it from the spiritual, it assumes its own agenda and begins to take over territory that was once ruled by the spiritual. When life in all its richness of diversity is no longer seen under the aspect of eternity, it becomes bounded by that which is visible, tangible, and measurable. Earthly life is gradually separated from the purposes of God and we go about our business thinking that the only matters of consequence are our income, our achievements, and our comfort. Believers in Christ can get so pulled into this trap that the only apparent difference between them and unbelievers is a tiny compartment of grace in their lives that they have fenced off from the encroachment of the natural. They have forgotten that God's eternal purposes must rule and reign not only in our ministry inside and outside the body of Christ, but over every aspect of our lives, including our families, our businesses, our finances, our entertainment, and our relationships in the community. (Reflections)

When we lose the biblical perspective, we give our hearts for the same toys and trinkets that consume the energies and aspirations of unbelievers. We begin to treat things that will not last as though they were permanent, and we commit the deadly error of ruling our lives by a temporal value system that will let us down in the end. Only when we see life from God's side will we believe that the trials, adversities, and ambiguities of life contribute to our ultimate good because they are used by our sovereign and loving Creator-Redeemer to form Christlike character, purpose, and hope in us. (Reflections)

As C. S. Lewis observed in *The Weight of Glory*, our problem is not that our desires are too strong, but that they are too weak. "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." Our heavenly Father offers us a transcendent source of dignity, identity, and destiny, and we sit around comparing mud pies, either boasting that ours are bigger and better, or moaning that other people have access to better mud. (Reflections)

We cannot place our hope in both what the world offers us and what our God offers us; nor can we fear God while we are fearing men. To paraphrase the challenge of Joshua to the Israelites, we must *choose for ourselves today whom we will serve*: whether the gods of pleasure, possessions, and worldly success, or the Living God of might, majesty, honor, glory, blessing, dominion, and power. (Reflections)

In the perfect happiness of heaven nothing more will remain to be desired; in the full enjoyment of God man will obtain whatever he has desired in other things. (Thomas Aquinas)

When you encounter periods of adversity or affliction, how do you pray? If you are like most people, your prayers probably consist of various attempts to persuade God to change your painful circumstances. After all, what did you do to deserve this mess, or what possible good could come out of it? Although far fewer people pray this way, I have come to the conclusion that in painful situations, it is wiser and more biblical to ask the Lord to change your character than to change your circumstances. Instead of looking for relief, it is better to discern what areas need reform. If we are willing to submit to God's loving and wise purposes for our lives, we will begin to see that He can use such times to reveal our deepest needs and draw us nearer to Him. In The Problem of Pain, C. S. Lewis wrote that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (Reflections)

God does not promise that His children will be exempt from tribulation, because that is part of our lot in a fallen world that awaits the time when it will be "set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory" that will come when Christ returns to restore all things (Rom. 8:19-22). Our Lord's promise is not that we will be delivered from suffering, but that He will deliver and transform us through the things we suffer, if we rely on His resources instead of our own. (Reflections)

During painful times, many people turn to the pill bottle, the liquor bottle, or the back door to find relief from their misery, but these escape hatches will disappoint those who trust in them. More often than not, we will not understand God's purpose in our afflictions; He does not script life the way we would like, and there are many times when we have to "faith it." If we cling to His character in the midst of our pain, we will not be disappointed in the long run. (Reflections)

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). God's purpose in our earthly adversities is to gradually conform our character to Christ and to prepare us for our true homecoming when we will see Him face to face. (Reflections)

It is impossible to progress far in our walk with Christ without a radical shift from an earthbound to a biblical perspective on life. Yet a surprisingly small minority of believers renew their minds on a consistent basis with the Scriptures, and this means that the majority are more likely to be influenced by their culture than by their Creator. The phenomenon of “compartmentalization” compounds the problem, since many people view Christianity as another compartment of their lives along with career, family, finances, children, hobbies, and so forth. It is something they practice on Sunday mornings and occasionally at other designated times, but it has little impact on the rest of their week. (Reflections)

For many believers, Christ is present in their lives, but His lordship is often resisted or rejected. For others, He is prominent in their lives, but there are still areas, such as work and finances, in which they hold onto the driver’s wheel. This is usually because they think they are in control or because they are afraid to trust Him in these particular facets of their lives. But there are also believers for whom Christ is preeminent as the focus of their being and pursuits. These people acknowledge His sufficiency and supremacy by relegating all areas to His rule and authority. For them, Christ is the central hub who orders and integrates every spoke of life. If the claims of Scripture are true, this is the only realistic option for a follower of Christ to follow, since the other options are based on the illusion that we are autonomous agents of our own destiny. The faulty assumption is that we have both the wisdom and control to accomplish what is best in our lives without complete dependence on the Lord. (Reflections)

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that’” (James 4:13-15). As believers in Christ, it is arrogant to suppose that we can ignore God’s intentions for our lives and it is foolish to think that we can find security or solve our problems by redoubling our efforts. (Reflections)

The wisdom literature of Scripture encourages us to inculcate complete and unflinching trust in the infinite and personal God who created us, redeemed us, cares for us, and gives us a purpose, a future, and a hope. The underlying issue in this psalm and in the rest of Scripture is whether we will pursue our own plans or God’s plans; whether we will attempt to control our lives and welfare or look to our heavenly Father for every good thing; whether we will trust our labor or trust our Lord. Trusting the Lord is active, not passive; it means that we do our work with diligence and excellence as for Him rather than for men (Colossians 3:23-24) and leave

the results in His hands. Only when we let go of ownership of results will be walking by faith and not by sight. (Reflections)

"It is not a tragedy to die for something you believe in, but it is a tragedy to find at the end of your life that what you believed in betrayed you." That statement, attributed to Joan of Arc, captures the essence of our ongoing struggle between the claims of the temporal and those of the eternal. (Reflections)

Because the visible world constantly impinges upon our senses and experiences, we tend to treat the temporal as though it were eternal and the eternal as though it were temporal. But the Scriptures remind us again and again that compared to the new creation for which God is preparing His children, this world which seems so permanent is really a fleeting shadow. If we place our hope and trust in the enticements and promises of the world, they will become dumb idols that will break our hearts and betray us in the end. But those whose hope and trust are in the character and promises of Christ Jesus will never be betrayed; "whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed" (Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6). (Reflections)

The God of the Bible is infinite, personal, and triune. As a communion of three Persons, one of God's purposes in creating us is to display the glory of His being and attributes to intelligent moral creatures who are capable of responding to His relational initiatives. In spite of human rebellion and sin against the Person and character of the Lord, Christ bore the awesome price of our guilt and inaugurated "a new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20) by which the barrier to personal relationship with God has been overcome. (Reflections)

Since God is the initiator of a loving relationship with us, our high and holy calling is to respond to His offer. Our Lord, in encapsulating the Law and the Prophets, gave us the essence of this response: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). The quality of our vertical relationship with God has a direct bearing on the quality of our horizontal relationships with others. As we grow in His grace, we will have an enhanced capacity, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to respond to others with the Christlike qualities of humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance (Ephesians 4:2). This agape which we receive from the Lord and which flows through us toward others is rooted in volition (our willingness to receive and display it) and is expressed through thinking and feeling in the deeds of other-centered love. (Reflections)

Loving God completely is a growth process that involves the personal elements of communication and response. By listening to the Holy Spirit in the words of Scripture and speaking to the Lord in our thoughts and prayers, we move in the direction of knowing Him better. The better we know Him, the more we will love Him, and the more we love Him, the greater our willingness to respond to Him in trust and obedience. ¶To love ourselves correctly is to see ourselves as God sees us and to allow the Word, not the world, to define us by telling us who and whose we really are. The clearer we capture the vision of our new identity in Christ, the more we will realize that our deepest needs for security, significance, and satisfaction are met in Him and not in people, possession, or positions. ¶A biblical view of our identity and resources in Christ moves us in the direction of loving others compassionately. Grasping our true and unlimited resources in Christ frees us from bondage to the opinions of others and gives us the liberty to love and serve others regardless of their response. (Reflections)

Since we cannot serve two masters, the focus of our heart will either be the temporal or the eternal. If it is the temporal, we cannot love God completely because of a divided heart. When Christ is a component instead of the center of life, things become complicated; the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things choke the word of truth in our lives and we do not bear lasting fruit (Mark 4:19). If the focus of our heart is the eternal, we will love Christ above His created goods and pleasures and begin to fulfill the enduring purpose for which we were created. (Reflections)

When Thomas Aquinas was pressed by his secretary, Reginald of Piperno, to explain why he stopped working on his uncompleted Summa Theologica, he said, "All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me." According to tradition, in his vision he heard the Lord say, "Thomas, you have written well of me: what shall be your reward?" and his reply was, "No reward but Yourself, Lord." Our greatest mental, physical, and social achievements are as straw compared to one glimpse of the living God (Phil. 3:7-10). Our Lord invites us to the highest calling of all—intimacy with Him—and day after day, we decline the offer, preferring instead to fill our stomachs with the pods of short-lived pleasures and prospects. (Reflections)

To know God is to love Him, because the more we grasp—not merely in our minds but in our experience—who He is and what He has done for us, the more our hearts will respond in love and gratitude. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). (Reflections)

When we discover that, beyond all hope and all imagination, the personal author of time, space, matter, and energy has chosen to love us to the point of infinite sacrifice, we begin to embrace the unconditional security we

longed for all our lives. God's love for us is spontaneous, free, uncaused, and undeserved; He did not set His love on us because we were lovable, beautiful, or clever, because in our sin we were unlovable, ugly, and foolish. He loved us because He chose to love us. As we expand our vision of our acceptance and security in Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us, we begin to realize that God is not the enemy of our joy but the source of our joy. It is when we respond to this love that we become the people He has called us to be. By God's grace we need to grow in love with Him in our thoughts, in our emotions, and in our actions. (Reflections)

As we grow to know and love God, we learn that we can trust His character, promises, and precepts. Whenever He asks us to avoid something, it is not because He is a cosmic killjoy, but because He knows that it is not in our best interests. And whenever He asks us to do something, it is always because it will lead to a greater good. If we are committed to following hard after God, we must do the things He tells us to do. But the risk of obedience is that it will often make no sense to us at the time. It is countercultural to obey the things the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the Scriptures. Radical obedience sometimes flies in the face of human logic, but it is in these times that our loving Father tests and reveals the quality of our trust and dependence on Him. Our great task in the spiritual life is to will to do His will, to love the things He loves, and to choose the things He sets before us for our good. (Reflections)

We are constantly in danger of letting the world define us instead of God, because it is so easy to do. It is only natural to shape our self-image by the attitudes and opinions of our parents, our peer groups, and our society. None of us are immune to the distorting effects of performance-based acceptance, and we can falsely conclude that we are worthless or that we must try to earn God's acceptance. It is only when we define ourselves by the truths of the Word rather than the thinking and experiences of the world that we can discover our deepest identity. (Reflections)

What does it mean to see ourselves as God sees us? Contrary to our culture, the biblical doctrine of grace humbles us without degrading us, and elevates us without inflating us. It tells us that apart from Christ, we have nothing and can do nothing of eternal value. We are spiritually impotent and inadequate without Him, and we must not put our confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). On the other hand, grace also tells us that we have become new creatures in Christ, having been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His light, life, and love. In Him, we now enjoy complete forgiveness from sins and limitless privileges as unconditionally accepted members of God's family. Our past has been changed because of our new heredity in Christ, and our future is secure because of our new destiny as members of His body. (Reflections)

A biblical understanding of grace addresses both human depravity and human dignity. It avoids the extreme of "worm" theology (I'm worthless, I'm no good, I'll never amount to anything, I'm nothing but a rotten sinner) and the opposite extreme of pride and autonomy ("what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"—2 Cor. 4:7). Grace teaches us that the most important thing about us is not what we do but who and whose we are in Christ. Being is more fundamental than doing; the better we grasp our identity in Christ, the more our actions will reflect Christlike character. (Reflections)

Loving God completely is the key to loving self correctly (seeing ourselves as God sees us), and this in turn is the key to loving others compassionately. The better we grasp God's unconditional love and acceptance of us in Christ, the more we are liberated from the selfish quest of using people to meet our needs. (Reflections)

Just as Jesus knew who He was, where He came from, and where He was going, so all who have put their trust and hope in Him should know the same. But few do. It is only as we frequently renew our minds with the spiritual truth of the Scriptures that we will move our thinking into alignment with the reality of who we are in Christ. Like Christ, we have dignity and power; every spiritual blessing has been given into our hands (Eph. 1:3, 19; 3:16, 20-21). We also have significance and identity; we have become the children of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1-2). And we have been given the security and destiny of knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:18, 35-39). These limitless resources meet our deepest needs and overcome the human dilemma of loneliness, insignificance, and meaninglessness. (Reflections)

When the truths of who we are in Christ begin to define our self-image, they make us secure enough to love and serve others without seeking our own interests first. Because of our security and significance in Christ, we do not need to be controlled by the opinions and responses of others. We have nothing to prove because we know who and whose we are. Rather than trying to impress and manipulate people, we can do our work with excellence as unto the Lord (Col. 3:23). The more we are concerned with what God thinks of us, the less we will be worried about what others think of us. And when we are no longer enslaved to people's opinions of us, we are free to love and serve them as Christ loves us—with no strings attached. (Reflections)

"We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the future every real gift which is offered them in the Present." Uncle Screwtape's diabolical counsel to his nephew Wormwood in C. S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters is a reminder that most

of us live more in the future than in the present. Somehow we think that the days ahead will make up for what we perceive to be our present lack. We think, "When I get this or when that happens, then I'll be happy," but this is an exercise in self-deception that overlooks the fact that even when we get what we want, it never delivers what it promised. (Reflections)

The real issue of contentment is whether it is Christ or ourselves who determine the content (e.g., money, position, family, circumstances) of our lives. When we seek to control the content, we inevitably turn to the criterion of comparison to measure what it should look like. The problem is that comparison is the enemy of contentment—there will always be people who possess a greater quality or quantity of what we think we should have. Because of this, comparison leads to covetousness. Instead of loving our neighbors, we find ourselves loving what they possess. (Reflections)

It is only when we allow Christ to determine the content of our lives that we can discover the secret of contentment. Instead of comparing ourselves with others, we must realize that the Lord alone knows what is best for us and loves us enough to use our present circumstances to accomplish eternal good. We can be content when we put our hope in His character rather than our own concept of how our lives should appear. (Reflections)

A biblical understanding of contentment leads to a sense of our competency in Christ. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). As Peter put it, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want, but the realization of how much we already possess in Christ. (Reflections)

Biblical faith is intrinsically bound up in hope because it is grounded in a Person we have not yet seen (see Rom. 8:24-25 and 1 Pet. 1:7-9). "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. . . . And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:1, 6). Faith is pleasing to God because it is the measure of the risk we place in His character and promises. Those who trust in Christ are, in effect, "betting the farm" on His claims and credentials; they are hoping that what He has promised, He is able also to perform (Rom. 4:21). (Reflections)

The essence of walking in faith is acting on the conviction that God alone knows what is best for us and that He alone is able to accomplish it. The problem with faith is that it goes against the grain of human inclination and culture because it is based on the invisible and uncontrollable. We

may give lip service to the proposition that God alone knows what is best for us, but in practice we are inclined to follow our own viewpoints, especially when times are tough. (Reflections)

A real Christian is an odd number, anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible; hears the inaudible; and knows that which passeth knowledge. (A. W. Tozer)

Knowledge and trust are best displayed in action. Regardless of what we say, it is what we do that will reveal what our hearts truly believe and trust. Faith in Christ has the property of growing through acts of obedience, and an obedient faith results in a greater knowledge of God. So there is a reciprocal relationship between the faith components of knowledge and action; the better we know Him, the more we want to obey Him, and the more we obey Him, the better we will know Him. Everything hinges on what we trust. If we trust our own wisdom, our hands are too full of ourselves to receive the gifts of God. It is only when we empty our hands of self-reliance, self-righteousness, self-pity, and other self-sins that they will be empty enough to receive the life of Christ in us and and display His life to others. (Reflections)

Worldly hope tells us to pursue passing pleasures, but biblical hope warns us not to sell ourselves so cheaply. God calls us to give ourselves to the things that will last and will not disappoint us in the end. If we focus our hearts on the eternal, we will enjoy the temporal as well; but if our primary pursuit is the temporal, we will not only lose the eternal, but also the temporal. (Reflections)

Almost everyone we meet lives with some kind of hope, some reason for getting up and going on. But it would not take much probing to reveal the shallowness and inadequacy of the things in which most people put their faith and hope. When men put their hope in money, power, and position for their sense of self-worth and fulfillment, they will discover, as countless others have before, that these things will let them down. When women hope first in their family, their possessions, or their social status to satisfy their longing for security and significance, they too will be disillusioned. ¶Those who know Jesus are by no means immune to the problem of misplaced hope. Many have slipped into the trap of hoping in Christ for their eternal salvation and hoping in the world for everything else. I believe the reason so many can swallow the camel of eternity and strain at the gnats of the temporal is that this earth seems so real to them

while heaven seems so vague and distant. With this mindset, it takes less faith to trust Christ for the afterlife than it does for this life. (Reflections)

It is during times of tribulation and adversity that we clarify the nature of our hope (see Rom. 5:3-5). Hope developed in good circumstances tends to be unreliable because it is untested. But God uses times of adversity and few alternatives to bring us into contact with a hope that will not let us down. (Reflections)

The only firm foundation for our hope is the unchanging character of the living God. It is when we find our refuge in Christ that we lay hold of a hope that is an anchor of the soul, a hope that will not disappoint because it is both sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:18-19; 1 Pet. 2:6). This biblical hope provides us with stability and direction because it draws us toward the promises of God. Since these promises are an extension of the Lord's character, a proper hope is founded on a willingness to trust in Him. The key to trusting Him is knowing Him, and the key to knowing Him is the time we spend walking with Him. (Reflections)

In the book of nature, God reveals His eternal power and divine nature (1:20), and in the book of human conscience, He reveals our imperfection and guilt (2:14-16). But it is only in the book of Scripture that God reveals His limitless love that can overcome our guilt and transform us into new creatures in Christ. God's loyal love for us is causeless (5:6), measureless (5:7-8), and ceaseless (5:9-11). There was nothing in us that merited or evoked His love; indeed, Christ died for us when we were His ungodly enemies. God's love is spontaneous and unending—He loved us because He chose to love us, and having responded to Christ's offer of forgiveness and relationship with Him, nothing can separate us from that love or diminish it (8:35-39). This means that we are secure in the Lord's unconditional love; since we belong to Christ, nothing we do can cause God to love us more, and nothing we do can cause God to love us less. (Reflections)

Our faith in the work Christ accomplished for us in the past and our hope of the future completion of this work when we see Him are demonstrated in the present through the choices and works of love. The more we love God, the more we will express His transcendent love in other-centered deeds of kindness and goodness. (Reflections)

the outcome of the unexamined life is rarely satisfactory. If we fail to pursue God's purpose for our lives, we are likely to suffer from destination sickness, the discovery that when we reach our destination, it's not all it was cracked up to be (cf. Eccles. 2:17). This sickness is captured in John Steinbeck's summation of a character in East of Eden who gave his life for that which let him down in the end: "He took no rest, no recreation,

and he became rich without pleasure and respected without friends.”  
(Reflections)

Many people define themselves in terms of their activities and accomplishments. But those who have experienced the grace, forgiveness, and newness of life in Christ are recipients of a new source of identity that redefines their mission and purpose on earth. Instead of seeking purpose by comparing themselves with others, they can discover God’s purpose for their lives in the pages of His revealed Word. (Reflections)

In His high priestly prayer after the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus said, “this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). This knowledge is not merely propositional and theological, but also personal and devotional. Eternal life is the experiential knowledge of God, and it involves a growth process that is inaugurated when a person trusts Christ and receives His gift of forgiveness and new life. The greatest treasure a person can own is increasing intimacy with the living Lord of all creation. Although this should be our highest ambition, many believers give their hearts to the quest for lesser goods and boast and delight in things that are destined to perish. This is why we should frequently heed the powerful words of Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.” (Reflections)

The Scriptures expressly communicate the purpose for which we have been created: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). God’s purpose for us is nothing less than Christlikeness! (Reflections)

If God’s purpose for us is not the focus of our lives, something else will be, and whatever it is will not be worthy of our ultimate allegiance. Therefore ask God for the grace to make it your highest ambition to be pleasing to Him (2 Cor. 5:9). (Reflections)

There is a sense in which many people live without being truly awake, without thinking and questioning, without a sense of wonder and awe. It is easy, even for believers in Christ, to lurch through life, never developing a clear picture of the unique purpose for which God placed them on this planet. (Reflections)

God’s universal purpose for all who know Christ can be summarized as knowing God experientially (spiritual growth), and making Him known to others (spiritual reproduction). The first part relates to the question, “Who

do You want me to be, Lord?" The second relates to the question, "What do You want me to do?" It is prudent to consider the first question before launching into the second, because biblically speaking, being precedes doing; who we are in Christ is foundational to what we do. Typically, however, we put activities and objectives before purpose and define ourselves more by measurable accomplishments than by godly character. The result is that our activities determine our purposes. But purposes developed in this way are shaped by comparison with peers and role models and never lead to the universal and unique purposes for which God created us. Instead, we should embrace a biblical perspective on purpose and let this determine our objectives and activities. (Reflections)

God uses His Word to train and equip us for ministry, and our effectiveness is related to the depth of our Bible reading, study, and memorization. The price tag is time and discipline, but the benefits are always disproportionate to the expenditures. If we are shallow in the Word, we will be superficial in our knowledge of God and less effective in our relationships with others. (Reflections)

Begin to ask God to clarify your personal vision of purpose. This will not happen by doubling up on activities, but through prayer, exposure to Scripture, and times of reflection. This process may take months or years, but it should lead to a brief written statement of purpose that can be used to determine and evaluate your objectives and activities. In this way, your activities will be determined more by the Word than by the external pressures of the world. ¶A biblical purpose is always an unchanging reason for being. It holds true for you regardless of your circumstances or season of life. When a Christ-centered purpose becomes the focus of your life, it harmonizes all the other areas, such as family, work, finances, and ministry. (Reflections)

If ultimate reality is an infinite and personal Being who created the cosmos and offers us the matchless privilege of an endless relationship with Him, then any other good on which we could set our hearts is unworthy of comparison. ¶Pascal wrote, "There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the dark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself." This is what Augustine affirmed in his Confessions when he wrote, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." (Reflections)

When Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68). Peter understood that without Christ, there are no other options; there is nowhere else to turn. This is the truth

every believer must come to admit: in times when we are tempted to despair and to abandon our walk with God, there is in fact no where else to turn but to Him. To look to anything else for solace is to lean on a broken reed. But to know Christ is to lay hold of the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the firstborn from the dead, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the creator and sustainer of all things, the ultimate and transcendent Source of true meaning and significance. (Reflections)

Instead of annihilation or reincarnation, the Scriptures teach resurrection into an eternally new existence of light, life, and love characterized by intimacy with our Lord and with one another. Everything we go through now will be more than worth it in the end, because the divine Architect of the universe, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, never builds a staircase that leads to nowhere. (Reflections)

It usually requires the sobering struggle of the mid-life crisis (or mid-life process, depending on the way we go through it) before we experientially grasp our mortality. As we discover the decline of our capacities and the increase of our responsibilities, we realize with clarity and force that we will not be able to fulfill many of our earthly hopes and dreams. This can be traumatic for those whose expectations are limited to this planet, but for believers whose hope is in the character and promises of God, it can be a powerful reminder to transfer their affections and ambitions to their only true home, the kingdom of heaven. (Reflections)

The responsibilities and pressures of this world clamor for our attention and tend to squeeze out our inner lives and starve our souls. When this happens, we lose sight of the things that really matter and focus on the things that are passing away. Our value systems become confused when we invest more of our thought and concern in things that are doomed to disappear than in that which will endure forever. (Reflections)

We must care for our bodies as though we were going to live forever, but we must care for our souls as if we were going to die tomorrow. (Augustine)

It is presumptuous to think that we can devote all our attention to the affairs of this world, assuming that there will be enough time later in life to become "spiritual." ¶Does this mean that we should be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good? In actual fact, it is precisely the opposite—when people become heavenly minded, they treasure the passing opportunities of this life and become more alive to the present moment. Rather than being overwhelmed with the problems and hassles of life, they understand that these too will pass, and that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). Instead of taking things for granted, they

learn to savor blessings and joys that are otherwise overlooked. (Reflections)

Instead of wasting time as though we had a million years to live on earth, we would do well to remember the apostle Paul's exhortation: "Be most careful then how you conduct yourselves: like sensible men, not like simpletons. Use the present opportunity to the full, for these are evil days. So do not be fools, but try to understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17, NEB). (Reflections)

It is difficult to convey the dramatic differences between the kingdom values of Scripture and the temporal values of the systems of this world. In a qualitative sense, they are virtually polar opposites—choose any value in Christ's kingdom, stand it on its head, and you will have a good likeness of the corresponding value in the world's kingdom. (Reflections)

The world tells us to appear wise and sensible to others, but the Word tells us to be willing to appear foolish for the sake of Christ. "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). Since the wisdom of God is unlike the wisdom of this world (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16; Jas. 3:13-18), our commitment and witness to Christ will often seem like nonsense to unbelievers. Building relational bridges by loving and serving seekers can overcome these intellectual barriers, but only when the Holy Spirit breaks through the volitional barrier of unwillingness to see the light of the glory of Christ. (Reflections)

The world tells us to save our lives by looking out for number one; the Word tells us that the only path to finding life is by abandoning it for the sake of Christ. "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). It is a terrifying thing to hand over control of our lives to another, but in truth, it is only the illusion of control that we give up, since God alone is sovereign. To find life by losing it is to move from "my will be done" to "Thy will be done" without any contingency clauses or fine print on the contract. (Reflections)

The world tells us to be first, but the Word tells us that the last will be first. "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all. . . . whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Mark 9:35; 10:43). We are often tempted to be first, because the quest for success and greatness in the sight of men naturally draws us with greater force than the willingness to abandon earthly plaudits for heavenly gain. (Reflections)

The world tells us to become rich, but the Word says we must be willing to be poor so that others may be rich. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor,

that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). KW views money in terms of security, significance, and power, and thus encourages us to amass more and more without asking the question, "How much is enough?" KC views money as a responsible stewardship before God and encourages us to invest it in the service of others. It allows the Lord to determine how much is enough and tells us to be content with what He has given us (1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19). (Reflections)

The world tells us to look to our own interests, but the Word exhorts us to serve the needs of others. "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others" (Phil. 2:4). In KW we want to be served, but in KC we choose to serve, even when it means being treated as a servant. KC makes it possible for us to assume this role because it teaches us that our own needs (physical, social, and spiritual) are already met in the fullness of Christ. (Reflections)

The world encourages us to exalt ourselves, while the Word admonishes us to humble ourselves. "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted. . . . Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Luke 14:11; Phil. 2:3). KC tells us to let go of our foolish attempts to impress people and to seek, with childlike abandon, the approval of God. (Reflections)

The world values receiving, but the Word tells us "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:33-35). The world tells us to be grabbers, but the Word tells us to be givers; KW teaches us to be manipulators; KC teaches us to be ministers. (Reflections)

The world prompts us to tell others about our good deeds, but the Word directs us to keep good deeds secret. "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Matt. 6:3-4). KW seeks present reward and the honor of men; KC seeks future reward and the honor of God. (Reflections)

In the world, love is a feeling and is conditional; in the Word, love is a commitment and is unconditional. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). Relationships in the world are tentative and self-

seeking, but relationships in Christ are covenantal and other-centered. (Reflections)

In the world, love often grows cold, but in Christ, love never fails. The agape of Christ is characterized by patience, kindness, a lack of jealousy or pride, a concern for others, a love of the truth, and a willingness to endure wrongs without being provoked or becoming cynical (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Since this is a volitional rather than emotional love, it can do the deeds of love even when the feelings are not present. In this way, the emotional components of the earthly loves are brought under the dominion of a divine love that chooses and seeks the highest good of others. (Reflections)

People under the rule of the world naturally hate their enemies, but those who are submitted to the Lord supernaturally love their enemies. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). The best way to overcome feelings of bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness toward those who treat us as enemies is to pray for them. We cannot pray for people and hate them at the same time. (Reflections)

The world teaches us to seek revenge when we believe we have been wronged, but the Word impels us to forgive others in the same way we have been forgiven through Christ. "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:12-13). Our natural impulse is to seek revenge or justice when we have been hurt by others. But when we sinned against God, He did not treat us with justice, but with mercy and grace. To withhold forgiveness is to forget our own desperate need for God's forgiveness. (Reflections)

The world tells us to cover our mistakes, but the Word exhorts us to acknowledge and confess our sins. "I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:5). When we refuse to acknowledge our wrongdoings against God and others, the burden of guilt increases along with the temptation to deny or cover them up. As long as we do this, it is impossible to walk in the light (see 1 John 1:5-10). (Reflections)

The world encourages us to emphasize human power, while the Word directs us to emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit. We must remember the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). It is not only a matter of

doing the right things; biblical obedience means that we do the right things (1) in God's timing, (2) in God's way, and (3) in God's power. If any of these three components are missing, the flesh will get in the way of the Spirit. It is easy even to minister to others out of the flesh instead of the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. (Reflections)

Believers are naturally inclined to become institutionally religious, but Scripture calls us to grow in love for God and for others. Speaking to Israel through the prophet Hosea, God said, "I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (6:6). On two occasions, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees with this truth when He told them that God is more concerned with compassion than with outward religious observance (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). We are often tempted to revert from relationship to religion, from the internal to the external, from being to doing, and from grace to law. (Reflections)

We typically seek to conform others to our way of thinking and acting, but Jesus tells us to conform ourselves to God's way of thinking and acting. "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3). In many relationships, people want to change the other person and get their own needs met. But in a Christ-centered relationship, we seek to meet the needs of others and change ourselves. (Reflections)

In the world, we say many things are impossible, but in Christ, we acknowledge that all things are possible to those who believe (Mark 9:23). In spite of the uncertainties and adversities of life, we can count on God's promise that He will cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). (Reflections)

The world counsels us to seek peace by trying to negotiate common agreements, while the Word tells us that the greatest peace is achieved by becoming one in the Spirit. In Christ we are called to walk in humility, gentleness, and patience as we show forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2-3). (Reflections)

While recognition is important in the world, anonymity is a valued goal in the Word. Jesus' words in Matthew 6:1-6 concerning almsgiving and prayer are often overlooked, but He warned us to beware of practicing our righteousness before others to be noticed by them. Even if others do not know what we have done, no good deed will be anonymous in the sight of God. (Reflections)

It takes great risk to let loose of everything we have been taught to clamor after and control. It is never comfortable or natural to treasure the invisible over the visible, the promises of God over the promises of the

world, the things that will not be fulfilled until the return of Christ over the things the world says we can have here and now. We want control and security on our own terms, yet the Scriptures tell us that the only true security comes from abandoning the illusion of control and surrendering ourselves unreservedly to the Person and purposes of God. (Reflections)

The Bible is God's declaration of His character and ways, His love letter to the people He sent His Son to redeem, and His blueprint for how to live life with wisdom, purpose, faith, love, and hope. (Reflections)

The basic presupposition of a believer in Christ is that the infinite and personal God exists and has decisively revealed Himself in Christ and the Scriptures. It follows from this that life is all about God, and not about us; all things have been created by Him and for Him (Col. 1:16), and we exist to serve God and not to persuade God to serve us. In essence, the Bible reminds us again and again that "I am God, and you are not." (Reflections)

Since we were created for relationship with the Author of every good thing, we can have no higher purpose than to grow in the knowledge of God and, by His grace and power, to become increasingly like Him. (Reflections)

Since the Bible was inspired by the living God, we would be wise to learn, understand, experience, and apply its precepts and principles. The Scriptures reveal that our brief earthly sojourn is designed to prepare us for eternal citizenship in heaven. Thus, it would be the heart of folly to become entangled and enmeshed in that which is "highly esteemed among men" but is "detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). In our careers, for example, we should execute our tasks with quality and care as servants of Christ rather than pleasers of men (Col. 3:22-24). Our ambition must be different from that of others; instead of pursuing position, power, prestige, or wealth, we should seek the approval of our God (2 Cor. 5:9). (Reflections)

We can expect to be pulled again and again toward the temporal and away from the eternal, because the truths of Scripture are countercultural. Whenever we are lured away from obedience and service to disobedience and selfishness, it is because we have been deceived into thinking that we know better than God what is best for us or that God is out of control. Obedience flows out of trust, and we will either obey the devices and desires of our own hearts or the word of Him who made us, loves us, and redeemed us. (Reflections)

Again and again, Jesus tells us not to be anxious about the things that consume the attention and hearts of the majority of people. Try as we may, we cannot control the content and outcome of our lives, and even if we could, the things most people pursue are not worthy of our ultimate

concern. Instead, our Lord invites us to take the risk of abandoning the pursuit of lesser things in favor of the single thing most needful: God's kingdom and righteousness. When this is our deepest passion, everything else will find its proper place. (Reflections)

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:37-39). In these radical words, Jesus claims our highest allegiance—we must allow no person, possession, or position to compete with Him as our heart's true desire. When we love Him more than others, we will discover that our capacity to love others will be greater than if we had loved them more than Christ. (Reflections)

"And someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:47-50). Our relationship with Jesus must transcend even the deepest of earthly ties. He must become closer and dearer to us than any other person; it is our highest privilege and calling to become intimate with Him. But this will never happen if we fail to take the time necessary to get to know Him. (Reflections)

We often approach God with a request for something vastly inferior to what He has in mind for us. So it was with the four men who lowered the paralytic through the roof, hoping that Jesus would heal his paralysis. Jesus' response, "My son, your sins are forgiven" was not at all what they had in mind, and if He had left the matter there, it is likely that they would have considered their mission a failure. But this story teaches us that the healing of the paralytic's inner spiritual condition was far more important than the healing of his outer physical condition. If we are more concerned with our temporal well being than with the quality of our relationship with our Creator, we will find ourselves substituting the peripheral for the essential. (Reflections)

In His parable of the soils, Jesus teaches that the seed of God's word will encounter differing degrees of reception. In some cases it will be ignored, in others it will be received with shallow and conditional enthusiasm, and in a few cases it will be greeted with unconditional and enduring responsiveness. But there are many people who are typified by the thorny soil—they welcome the word and want to follow it, but soon become encumbered by three things: the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. In their case, the concerns of the

temporal choke out the call to the eternal and the word becomes unfruitful. These thorns in Mark 4:19 are worth considering from time to time to help us diagnose the extent to which the word is being choked in our lives. (Reflections)

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:34-37). It takes little perception to see that most people give their lives in exchange for things that will neither last nor satisfy. Some barter their souls for wealth; others sell themselves for positions, titles, the acceptance of others, health, accomplishments, and the like. Jesus tells us that the things people live and die for are not enough—they are selling themselves too cheaply. There is but one thing worthy of our soul, and that is a relationship with Him. As we grow in that relationship, we will discover that we are not our own but His, and that we must lose our life for His sake in order to find it. (Reflections)

“And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property” (Mark 10:21-22). The story of the rich young ruler is one of those passages we would prefer to ignore because it seems altogether too radical. It is important, however, to note that the real issue in this encounter is whether the ruler is willing to abandon whatever it is that is keeping him from surrendering to the claims of Christ. In his case, he was unwilling to let go of his property in order to lay hold of the Lord. In someone else’s case, the issue may not be property, but a person or security or pride or a tightly held sin. But note that the more we have in this world, the more it will hold us, and the harder it will be to abandon our temporal toys for lasting treasure. (Reflections)

“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). C. S. Lewis concluded Mere Christianity with these poignant words: “Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.” Everything we give

to Christ will be multiplied and given back to us, because nothing He asks us to sacrifice is ever truly lost. (Reflections)

“What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28-31). The Lord Jesus summarizes all of divine revelation in relational terms. Our vertical relationship with God is the most important thing about us, and it should extend to every component of our being—our minds, wills, emotions, and bodies. When this relationship takes supremacy, it will extend to, enhance, and empower our horizontal relationships with others. To live in love and charity with God and our neighbors is to walk in the light of eternity. (Reflections)

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:46-49). There are only two foundations upon which we can build our lives; one will sustain us in the day of adversity, and the other will disappoint us. To build upon the sand of temporal prospects and promises is to hear but disobey the call of Christ upon our lives. It is only when we are willing to trust Him enough to align our decisions and hopes with His will as revealed in Scripture that we build upon the rock of the eternal promises of God. We will always be tempted to conform to the promises of the world rather than the promises of the Word, but this is because it is easier to view things from the short term rather than the long term. (Reflections)

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord’s word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.’ But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:38-42). Life is full of so many demands and distractions that it is extraordinarily difficult to get our eyes off the multiplicity of finite concerns and focus our attention on the one thing that is necessary.

To choose “the good part” means that we must first let loose of all the others and then align them with the only thing that truly matters—the invitation to intimacy with God. Surely it is necessary to deal with the mundane affairs of day-to-day living, and Martha illustrates this truth. But there are times when we must imitate Mary by sitting at the feet of Jesus simply to behold His beauty and listen to His wisdom. (Reflections)

“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions. . . . But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:15, 20-21). In His parable of the rich man, Jesus reveals our natural tendency toward selfishness, covetousness, and misplaced security in the things of this world. It is just at the point when the rich man plans to store up many goods for the years to come that his soul is required of him. His mistake was to equate his identity with the abundance of his possessions; in doing so, his point of integration was downward (the things of this earth), not upward (the things of heaven). It is better to live in a state of constant financial insecurity and be rich toward God than to have great worldly assets and be a spiritual pauper. (Reflections)

“And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:8-9). The parable of the unjust steward does not commend the steward for his dishonesty, but uses him as an example of shrewdness in converting the assets at his disposal into good will with others, so that when the assets fail, the relationships will continue. Jesus applies the parable by reminding us to transmute the earthly assets of time, talent, and treasure that are temporarily at our disposal into spiritual wealth by investing them in the lives of others. Our earthly wealth will fail us when we depart from this world, but the spiritual wealth will last forever. (Reflections)

“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:10-13). The critical test of stewardship is faithfulness to opportunity. If a person is unfaithful in the small areas of life, the compromised character that results will eventually extend to the larger arenas as well. The converse is also true; those who

prove trustworthy in the little things will also be trustworthy in the essential things. Scripture tells us that we serve God by loving and serving others in His name (1 John 4:11-21). At any point, we will either use people and serve things or we will serve people and use things; we cannot do both at the same time. (Reflections)

“And he said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead’” (Luke 16:27-31). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham after his death, while the latter finds himself in a place of agony. The relative pleasures of earthly wealth are brief and uncertain, but the unbridled joys of heavenly wealth are endless and unwavering (1 Peter 1:4). Those who refuse to heed the warnings of Scripture about the consequences of not knowing God will miss the whole purpose for which they were created. Our earthly sojourn is a brief window of opportunity to respond to God’s claims upon our lives, but the window, once closed, can never be opened again. (Reflections)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:3, 5-6). We often hear the idea that all people are children of God and brothers and sisters of each other. While all people are God’s offspring (Acts 17:26-29) and have been made in the likeness of God (James 3:9), Scripture tells us that because of the separation caused by the fall, it requires nothing less than the miracle of the spiritual birth for men and women to become God’s spiritual children (John 6:38-44; Ephesians 2:3; 1 John 3:10). The physical birth makes us alive to the world, but it must be followed by the spiritual in order for us to be alive to God. The former is only temporal, but the latter is eternal. It has been observed that those who are born once die twice, but those who are born twice die once. (Reflections)

“I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” (John 5:41-44). This remarkable passage tells us that the audience to which we play will shape the structure of our beliefs. The more we seek honor and approval from people rather than from God, the harder it will be for us to believe what He tells us about this world as opposed to the next. It is

impossible to seek simultaneously the glory that is from men and the glory that is from God. Only as we die to the former do we become alive to the latter. This death is contrary to the world, the flesh, and the devil; it is only possible through the supernatural grace of God, and we must ask for this grace in our lives. As Augustine put it in his Confessions, "Give me the grace to do as You command, and command me to do what You will." (Reflections)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal" (John 6:26-27). Like the contrast between ordinary and living water in John 4, this contrast between the food which perishes and the food which endures to eternal life symbolizes the difference between the passing things of this world and the permanent realities of the next. The truth is that the bulk of people who have made their brief entrances and exits in the drama of human experience have elected to work for the food which perishes. But if Jesus' words in the next passage are true, there is much more to life than that which is marked off by the boundaries of birth and death. (Reflections)

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). Our true home is where our true family and citizenship is: heaven (Philippians 3:21). Even now, our Lord is preparing a place for us prior to His return to receive us to Himself. Since no earthly abode is worthy to be compared to what He has in mind for us, we would do well to remember to hold the gifts and possessions of this life loosely, lest they capture our hearts and make us live for them instead of Christ. (Reflections)

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. . . . By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:4-5, 8). Fruit is the product of excess life; it is the function of the branch to receive and transmit this life from the roots of the vine. Similarly, if we are to bear spiritual fruit, we must be conduits of the life of Christ in us, allowing Him to live in and through us by surrendering ownership and control of our lives to Him. We cannot create fruit on our own; only by receiving and displaying His life will we glorify God by bearing the fruit that will last forever. (Reflections)

The world promotes pleasure as an end in itself. It implies that people who are willing to forgo earthly pleasures in their pursuit of the ways of God are missing out on "the good life." The Word says that knowing God is the greatest pleasure of all. God Himself is the Source of true pleasure; by comparison, everything else is a shadow. (Reflections)

The world exalts recognition and approval of men. The Word exhorts us to desire the approval of God above that of men. "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). (Reflections)

The world tells us to pursue fame and popularity. In contrast, the Word calls us to emulate the servanthood of Christ. It has been well said that everyone ought to fear to die until we have done something that will always live. Since people will go into eternity, our other-centered acts of kindness and sacrificial service that are borne out of the love of Christ will endure forever. (Reflections)

The world raises wealth and status as a standard of success, security, and identity. But as C. S. Lewis noted, "Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is 'finding his place in it,' while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home in earth" (The Screwtape Letters). The Word elevates the standard of integrity and character. ("But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them;" Jeremiah 45:5.) God sometimes grants the severe mercy of taking His children's toys away for a time so that they will transfer their hope from the creation to the Creator. (Reflections)

The world drives us to amass power over people and circumstances; the Word tells us to walk humbly before our God. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). (Reflections)

As the story of the wedding at Cana illustrates, the world pours out its best wine first and switches to the cheap wine after people's discernment has been dulled. But our Lord's miracle of turning the water into wine teaches us that for those who follow Him, the best is reserved for last. (Reflections)

If ours is an eternal perspective, we will be gripped by the biblical truth that our brief earthly sojourn is designed to prepare us for an eternal heavenly citizenship. The more we align ourselves with this perspective, the more it will have an impact on our short-term and long-term priorities. Part of our problem is that God's promises seem vague and distant—we have no

memories of heaven. But He has given us His word that He will more than make it worth our while. "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). If we remember that here we are sojourners, strangers, and aliens in exile, our priorities will begin to reflect those of Abraham who "was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10). (Reflections)

"We have a clear sense of birth, but a theoretical sense of death. Understand that you have a certain number of days. There is no good time to die. You don't retire from life and get ready for death. When you leave this planet you will never again have the privilege of sharing the gospel, serving the lost, feeding the poor. This is not a guilt trip, but a reminder to enjoy the opportunity and privilege of representing Christ to the world. This proceeds out of love. The love you give back to Him drives the opportunities you have. We must not just wait to get to heaven, but relish the only opportunities we will have." (Mark Pett)

Heaven is the fulfillment of the deepest longings of the heart that we rarely encounter because of our pursuit of lesser desires and pleasures. In one sense, heaven is a place (e.g., the new Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21), but in a more profound sense, it is the unmediated presence of a Person (e.g., John 17:3 and Revelation 22:4: "this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. . . . and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads"). If this is so, there is a real inconsistency with the many people who want to go to heaven but who show no interest in knowing God while they are on this earth. They are more interested in a sensory paradise than in the supreme pleasure of knowing the infinite-personal Creator. (Reflections)

Try to imagine a realm in which the downward pulls of (1) the flesh (our capacity to sin), (2) the world system that lures us away from God, and (3) the warfare with the spiritual forces of evil are completely removed. Add to this the amplified capacities of resurrected existence and the implications this has for a radically different sense of time and space (the vast bulk of our brief earthly sojourn is occupied with things such as food, clothing, and transportation that will be unnecessary). Far from being boring, our future existence is a context of unlimited creative activity without frustration to the glory of God. The relational richness with God and others will be so great that our most profound earthly experiences of intimacy and joy with other people can only hint at what will be true of all relationships in heaven. (Reflections)

Far from being static and boring, heaven will be so multifaceted, joyful, and dynamic that the options for personal and communal expression, continued growth, and deepening understanding will be infinitely diverse.

The ultimate joy will be found in the beatific vision of God; our greatest pleasure will be to worship Him and explore the unimaginable depths and mysteries of His person, powers, and perfections. Since He is infinite, there will be endless surprises and ever-new sources of jubilation, delight, and rejoicing. Until then, we would do well to associate the hints of heaven in Scripture with the powerful longings and desires we sense only occasionally that tell us that we were meant for more than anything this world can provide. As C. S. Lewis tells us, these images and desires are “not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited” (The Weight of Glory). (Reflections)

Entrance into heaven is solely a matter of the grace of God and not of works, since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). God’s justice would mean that all would be eternally separated from the holiness of God, but God’s grace offers us far more than justice requires. But while salvation is by grace, rewards in the kingdom of heaven are based on works. This means that the quality of our life on this planet has eternal consequences, and that how we live in this temporal realm will have a direct bearing on the quality of eternity. (Reflections)

Whether we like it or not, each one of us is accountable to God, and no one will escape His righteous judgment. Unbelievers will face the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and will be judged on the basis of their works. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) where their works will also be judged (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The difference is that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1; see John 5:24) since Christ bore their judgment and gave them His life. Nevertheless, the judgment seat of Christ is not a trivial matter since it can involve loss as well as reward in the kingdom of heaven. I sometimes put it this way: “it’s easy to lip-synch in the chorus of life, but each of us will have to sing solo before God.” (Reflections)

When we come to Christ, He becomes the foundation of our life and the basis of our entrance into heaven. The superstructure we build upon the foundation is made of our works which consist of “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (1 Corinthians 3:12). At the judgment seat, the entire superstructure is set on fire to test the quality of each one’s work. We will be rewarded for that which endures the test of purgation (gold, silver, precious stones) and suffer loss for that which is burned up (wood, hay, straw). In view of the fact that believers can be disqualified from rewards through lack of faithfulness or receive the approval of God because of faithfulness (see 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; Philippians 3:10-14; 2 Timothy 2:12; 4:7-8; James 3:1), it is perilous to live in complacency as though we will avoid a day of reckoning. (Reflections)

In three of His parables, Jesus illuminated the condition for rewards and revealed that it is quite different from the criteria the world uses to determine compensation. According to the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16, rewards are not based on the amount of time one labors in God's vineyard. It is the providence of God that determines the amount of this world's goods and the length of time we are entrusted with. Our responsibility relates to the way we invest the time we have been granted, whether we are given one or seventy years after our conversion to Christ. (Reflections)

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 and the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11-27 teach us that rewards are based neither on the gifts and abilities we have received nor on the level of our productivity. Instead, they are determined by the degree of our faithfulness to the opportunities we have been given. If rewards were based on time, talent, or treasure, those who are relatively rich in these assets would be rewarded for possessing things that actually come from the providential hand of God. The fact that rewards are based on faithfulness to the assets and opportunities we have been given is the divine equalizer that gives every believer, regardless of economic, social, intellectual, or vocational status, the possibility of being approved by God. (Reflections)

Faithfulness relates to the issue of stewardship of the assets and resources of another. There are five facets of stewardship that include not only time, talent, and treasure, but also truth and relationships. The question is not how much truth we have been exposed to or the size of our relational influence, but what we are doing with the truth and the people God has given us. Faithfulness in the New Testament also relates to the degree of our obedience to God's precepts and principles as revealed in Scripture (including our participation in the Great Commission) as well as the way we respond to the circumstances in which I have been placed. (Reflections)

Although Scripture frequently encourages us to pursue reward with God, it tells us little about the nature and content of that reward. The principal reason for this may be that in our present state, we are limited in our capacity to grasp the real nature of heavenly rewards (1 Corinthians 2:9). But we can be well assured that they will be worth any temporal sacrifice to gain. The Scriptures relate rewards to three areas. The first of these is greater responsibility in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 16:10-12; 19:17-19). Believers will evidently be granted different spheres of authority based on their faithfulness on earth. The second area is the degree to which we reflect and display the glory and character of God. "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2-3; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:40-41; 2 Corinthians 3:13-18). We are not called to glorify ourselves but to receive and display the glory of the

majestic perfections of the infinite and wondrous God of all creation. The third area relates to our capacity to know and experience God. There must be some continuity between the relationships we develop with God and others on earth and the corresponding relationships we will experience in heaven. There are always consequences to relational intimacy and distance; those who cultivate a growing appetite for the experiential knowledge of God in this life will surely know Him better in the next life than those who kept God in the periphery of their earthly interests. As A. W. Tozer put it, "every Christian will become at last what his desires have made him. We are the sum total of our hungers. The great saints have all had thirsting hearts. Their cry has been, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' Their longing after God all but consumed them; it propelled them onward and upward to heights toward which less ardent Christians look with languid eye and entertain no hope of reaching." I can conceive of nothing more significant and compelling than the beatific vision of the living God, and if our capacity for this vision relates to faithfulness in this life, every other concern should pale in comparison. (Reflections)

Because believers have a new nature and are indwelt by the Spirit of God, they have more options than unbelievers. They can choose to walk by the Spirit and do things that are pleasing to God, whereas those who do not know Christ cannot please God, since even their good deeds are tainted by the fallen nature. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6). "They turn, but not upward, they are like a deceitful bow" (Hosea 7:16). "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). (Reflections)

The Bible tells us that the problem with the human condition is internal, and that the only solution is a changed heart. The transformation available through the new birth in Christ is wrought from the inside out, so that in Christ we become new creatures. Nevertheless, while we are in this body and in this world, believers are still susceptible to the same influences that exert a pull on unbelievers. Worldly or temporal motivators include fear of loss, guilt, pride, hope of personal gain, reputation, prestige, and pleasure. These are "horizontal" motivators, since they are related to the short-term dynamics of the visible and the now. Biblical motivators, however, are more "vertical" since they relate to the long-term dynamics of the invisible and the not yet. It is not surprising, then, that believers find it easier to be prompted by the former than by the latter. Even when our actions are based upon thinking rather than emotions, it is natural for our thinking to be shaped by a temporal and human perspective. It is only

as we yield ourselves to the lordship of Christ and renew our minds with spiritual truth that our thought life will be shaped by an eternal and godly perspective. (Reflections)

Scripture exhorts us to be drawn by a single passion—a concern for one thing above all else, the one thing most needed (Luke 10:41-42). When we are not propelled and impelled by one ultimate attraction, we are pulled by multiple desires. The worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things (Mark 4:19) can choke the word in our lives and prevent us from bearing lasting fruit. When we turn from the lures of the world to the Person of Christ, we discover “the magnet that draws, the anchor that steadies, the fortress that defends, the light that illumines, the treasure that enriches, the law that commands and the power that enables” (Alexander Maclaren). (Reflections)

Even as believers we may be tempted in difficult times to question the validity of following Christ and living in obedience to Scripture. We may wonder if it is really worth it all. It is in times like these when Simon Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” may be the only thread that holds us in contact with reality: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:66-69). Where else can we go? Either Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, or He is not; there is nothing in between. And if He is who He claims to be, there is no genuine way, no absolute truth, and no eternal life apart from Him. The honesty of admitting this during times of trial and loss can help us cling to God even when there appears to be no positive reason for doing so. To paraphrase a line in The Screwtape Letters, Satan’s cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do God’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys. (Reflections)

What does it mean to fear God? Consider Jesus’ words to the multitude that gathered to hear Him: “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4-5). Although the living and omnipotent God is worthy of far more reverence than we accord to men, Jesus knows that our natural tendency is to be more concerned about the opinions and responses of people whom we can see than about the favor of God whom we cannot see. Jesus’ words remind us that succumbing to this tendency to play to the visible over the invisible is a serious mistake, because the consequences of disobedience to God are so much greater than the consequences of disobedience to men. God’s authority is absolute, and our ultimate disposition is in His hands alone. Therefore, anything short of absolute surrender to His claims on

our lives is a misguided attempt at autonomy, and this is a game we can never win. (Reflections)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18). John has been describing the confidence we have in the day of judgment as believers in Christ, knowing that we are the recipients of the love of God. This love dispels the terror of condemnation and assures us that we abide in Christ because He has given us of His Spirit (4:13). But John is not dispelling the need for a holy awe and reverence of God. Indeed, when he saw the glorified Christ in Revelation 1, fell at His feet as a dead man. At that point, the Lord laid His right hand upon him and said, “Do not be afraid: I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Revelation 1:17-18). (Reflections)

The fear of the Lord not only means the cultivation of a reverential awe of God, but also relates to the mindset of a subject in a great kingdom. It is the recognition that the King has all power and authority in His hand, and that the subject’s life, occupation, and future are dependent on the good pleasure of the King. It is the ongoing acknowledgement of His sovereignty and the truth that our lives are in His hands. It is the foundation for wisdom because it leads to a sense of profound dependency, submission, and trust. (Reflections)

A deepening understanding that we are Christ’s bondservants should be part of our motivational structure (see Luke 17:7-10). It can draw us away from the folly of trusting in people more than trusting in God. “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh His strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. . . . Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5, 7). It is a fundamental spiritual blunder to be more concerned about pleasing people than about pleasing God, and to be more afraid of human disapproval than divine disapproval. (Reflections)

The Bible is clear that God’s love for us is always previous to our love for Him. “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:8-10). The infinite and unchanging Source of love reached down to us even when we were His enemies in our foolish rebellion against His Person and purposes. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). (Reflections)

Jesus loved us when we were unlovable and unworthy of His attention and care. Because of His agonizing work as our sinbearer, the way has

been opened for those who were “formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds” (Colossians 1:21) to become God’s beloved children, members of His royal family forever. This love humbles us because it is undeserved, but it elevates us because it means that when we come to God by entrusting ourselves to His Son, nothing we do can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). (Reflections)

The more we come to grasp and enter into God’s love for us, the more we will want to reciprocate by loving and honoring the eternal lover of our souls. As John writes, “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The security and significance of God’s unquenchable love gives us a basis for responding with love for God and expressing that love in tangible ways through acts of loving service to others. In His Upper Room Discourse Jesus said, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:9-10). There is a mutual relationship between abiding in the love of Christ and keeping His commandments. When we dwell in the sphere of His unmerited love, we begin to see that His commandments are not burdensome but liberating. Abiding in His love, we become more inclined to obey Him not only because it is in our own best interests, but because it is pleasing to Him. Thus the apostle Paul wrote, “we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). The ambitions of this world are directly or indirectly tied to self-aggrandizement, but the ambition of a true disciple is not exaltation of the self but exaltation of Christ. As we grow in discipleship, our motivational structure is shaped more and more by Christ’s love for us and our developing love for Him (“For the love of Christ controls us”; 2 Corinthians 5:14). This relationship is reciprocal: the more we love Him, the more we will desire to obey Him; the more we obey Him, the more we will grow in our personal knowledge and love for Him. (Reflections)

If we consider the depth and breadth of God’s care and blessings in our lives, we will realize that it is only right that we should give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Sadly, however, we are more inclined to view our lives in terms of what we lack than in view of what we have already received. Instead of seeing the fullness of what we have received in Christ, we tend to approach our experiences from the perspective of deficiency. Our gratitude ages quickly when we overlook God’s gifts, take them for granted, or regard them as our due. (Reflections)

We would be wise to keep a grateful memory alive by periodically reviewing what once was, what might have been, and what could well be again apart from God’s grace (Os Guinness). We should be amazed and thankful for the multitude of good things in our lives, including the ones we often overlook such as food and covering, health, freedom, friends, open access to the Scriptures, and most of all, the riches available to us in a

relationship with Christ Jesus. As our gratitude for who God is and what He has done begins to grow, it becomes a meaningful source of motivation for service to our Lord and to others. (Reflections)

Gratitude for what God has done for us in the past can motivate us to trust Him in the present for what He is going to do in the future. John of Avila observed that "One act of thanksgiving when things go wrong is worth a thousand thanks when things go right." When we develop the habit of recounting the blessings we have received as God's beloved children, we become more inclined to view the hardships and disappointments we face from a long-term Romans 8:18, 28 stance. Love and gratitude are healthy biblical motivators that can help us stay in the process of growth in Christlikeness. (Reflections)

Since there will be a day of reckoning, we would be wise to order our lives with this truth in mind. The Bible calls us away from a mindset of complacency to the pursuit of discipleship and fruit-bearing. It cautions us not to be seduced by the things our culture declares to be important, because "that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). The vast bulk of what the world tells us to pursue is directly related to the opinions of others. But in the end, people's opinions will be irrelevant; when we stand before God, only His opinion will matter. (Reflections)

The approval and rewards of God become possible through justification (our new position in Christ) but are realized through sanctification (growth in Christlikeness). As wonderful as it is, the gift of eternal life is not an end in itself, but a means to the end that we become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). This is the goal of sanctification or discipleship, and it is never completed on this earth. Thus, the Scriptures describe three dimensions of salvation: (1) Justification deals with the past, and relates to salvation from the penalty of sin. (2) Sanctification concerns the present, and relates to salvation from the power of sin. (3) Glorification anticipates the future, and relates to salvation from the presence of sin. ¶Reward as a biblical motivator focuses on the third of these dimensions, our future glorification. Seen in this way, justification is the basis of our glorification, and sanctification is the preparation for our glorification. If we focus our perspective on what will happen in the life to come, we will order our lives in ways that are more consistent with God's loving purposes. (Reflections)

It has been observed that the Apostle Paul really had only two days on his calendar: today and that day (the day he would stand before Christ), and he lived every "today" in light of "that day." He reveled in God's great gift of justification and encouraged believers to grow in sanctification, but his great hope was in God's promise of glorification. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the

glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). (Reflections)

The Scriptures teach that it is not mercenary to be motivated by reward; instead, Jesus encouraged us to long to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord." The New Testament is replete with exhortations to pursue God's rewards, affirming that they are more than worth the cost. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. . . . [Moses considered] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward" (Hebrews 11:6, 26). "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). (Reflections)

C. S. Lewis argued in his marvelous sermon The Weight of Glory that our problem is not that our desires are too strong, but that they are too weak. "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." In comparison to what God wants to give us, the best this world can offer is toys, trinkets, and tinsel. ¶We should be motivated by the fact that right now we are in the process of becoming what we will be in eternity. We should give it everything we have, because eternal gain will be worth anything we sacrificed in our brief earthly sojourn. (Reflections)

Our culture tells us that our worth is determined by our accomplishments and encourages us to pursue significance and meaning through the things we do. Scripture tells us that our worth is determined by what Christ was

willing to do for us, and that in Him we have an unlimited and unchanging source of meaning and purpose. Who we are in Christ is not shaped by what we do, but by what He did on the cross and continues to do in our lives. It is not our performance that determines our identity, but our new identity in Jesus becomes the basis for what we do. If we perceive ourselves to be worthless or inadequate, this will be manifested in our behavior. But if we choose to acknowledge the truth of Scripture, we will begin to see God and ourselves in a new light. In spite of what our culture and experiences have taught us to feel, the New Testament tells us that we became new creatures when we trusted in Christ. In Him, we have been granted great dignity, security, forgiveness, unconditional love and acceptance, hope, purpose, righteousness, wholeness, and peace with God. We may not feel that these things are so, but Scripture does not command us to feel the truth, but to believe it. This is a matter of acknowledging its authority by taking God at His word in spite of how we feel or who we think we are. (Reflections)

We honor God when we allow Him to define us and tell us who we are regardless of our feelings or experiences to the contrary. In Christ, we are overcomers who have been adopted into God's family; set free from bondage to Satan, sin, and death; called and equipped to accomplish an eternal purpose that will have enduring results; raised up with Christ and partakers of His life; sealed, anointed, indwelt, and empowered by the Holy Spirit; recipients of an imperishable inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us; members of the body of Christ and joint heirs with Him; chosen, redeemed, forgiven, and set apart; destined to be raised in a glorified body in which we will behold God and live in communion with Him forever. Since things are so, and since nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39), we are spiritual champions who are called to live as such. Like Joe Louis, when we know who we are, we have nothing to prove. Furthermore, the degradation of sin is beneath the dignity of the people we have become in Christ. When we are tempted to covet, lust, lie, become envious, or succumb to any other work of the flesh, we should say, "That is no longer who I am." While we are on this earth, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the boastful pride of life will be constant snares, but we are more than conquerors when we remember that our deepest identity is in Christ and invite Him to rule and live through us. (Reflections)

Jesus had a clear understanding of the purpose of His life, and He derived His purpose from His Father and not His own ambitions or aspirations. The hallmark of His life was to learn His Father's will and walk in the power of the Spirit to bring it to fruition. The gospels record three particularly clear purpose statements that related to our Lord's life mission: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. . . . For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. . . . I glorified Thee on the earth,

having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do" (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10; John 17:4). Jesus' purpose was to glorify His Father by seeking, serving, and saving the lost. (Reflections)

Hebrews 6:11-20 instructs us to fix our hope solely on the character and promises of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is but one safe refuge for hope in this world, and that is the unchanging character of the triune God and the certain promises of Scripture that flow out of His character. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us" (Hebrews 6:19-20). Thus, hope in the Bible is assured by God's character. (Reflections)

We lay hold of biblical hope by faith (Ephesians 1:18), and the more it motivates us, the more it becomes evident to others (1 Peter 1:3; 3:15). It also assures us that whatever God calls us to do will be more than worth it all. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). (Reflections)

Longing to see God and to enter His consummate presence is an oft-repeated theme in the writings of the great saints in the history of the church, but it is rarely seen in the Christian literature of this century. Six hundred years ago, for instance, Julian of Norwich, in her Revelations of Divine Love asked God for the three faithful wounds of contrition for her sins, compassion for others, and an intense longing for God. She wrote, "At the same moment the Trinity filled me full of heartfelt joy, and I knew that all eternity was like this for those who attain heaven. For the Trinity is God, and God the Trinity; the Trinity is our Maker and keeper, our eternal lover, joy and bliss – all through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . We have got to realize the littleness of creation and to see it for the nothing that it is before we can love and possess God who is uncreated. This is the reason why we have no ease of heart or soul, for we are seeking our rest in trivial things which cannot satisfy, and not seeking to know God, almighty, all-wise, all-good. He is true rest. It is His will that we should know Him, and His pleasure that we should rest in Him. Nothing less will satisfy us. . . . We shall never cease wanting and longing until we possess Him in fulness and joy. Then we shall have no further wants. Meanwhile His will is that we go on knowing and loving until we are perfected in heaven. . . . The more clearly the soul sees the blessed face by grace and love, the more it longs to see it in its fullness." (Reflections)

C. S. Lewis in his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, related true joy to what he called Sehnsucht or longing. He spoke of the stab and pang of acute longing as a homesickness for a place and a time we have not yet visited that is beyond the edge of the imagination. "The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to

meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last. . . . Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache" (The Weight of Glory). "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). (Reflections)

Henri Nouwen in his perceptive book, The Return of the Prodigal Son, describes his encounter with Rembrandt's painting of this parable and the remarkable effect this painting had on his self-understanding. "It had brought me into touch with something within me that lies far beyond the ups and downs of a busy life, something that represents the ongoing yearning of the human spirit, the yearning for a final return, an unambiguous sense of safety, a lasting home." It is an aspiration to turn to our Father's house and to find the deep satisfaction of His embrace and of being treasured by Him. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). (Reflections)

Coming to Christ is "not an end but an inception, for now begins the glorious pursuit, the heart's happy exploration of the infinite riches of the Godhead. That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no man has yet discovered, for there is in the awful and mysterious depths of the Triune God neither limit nor end. . . . To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too-easily-satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart" (A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God). This holy desire, this transcendent ambition, is captured in Jesus' penetrating words, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:32-33). "Jesus took it for granted that all human beings are 'seekers.' It is not natural for people to drift aimlessly through life like plankton. We need something to live for, something to give meaning to our existence, something to 'seek,' something on which to set our hearts and our minds" (John Stott, Christian Counter-Culture). (Reflections)

God waits to be wanted, but He must be wanted for Himself and not for some lesser good He may provide. May we ask for the grace to long for the beatific vision, for the vision of God Himself. "There shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:3-4). (Reflections)

When you come to the end of yourself, you find the beginning of God. (Max Anders)

Biblical love is the steady direction of one's will toward another's lasting good.

When we come to Christ, we exchange the temporal for the eternal, death for life, darkness for light, fear for love, doubt for faith, physical for spiritual, despair for joy, confusion for purpose, self for God. (Max Anders)

Our temptation is to live life on the surface. We want, by nature, two things from life: peace and prosperity. We want God to help us gain peace and prosperity. We want to know just enough of the Bible to make our lives go smoother, but not so much as to make us change our priorities. (Max Anders)

We cannot move away from God without moving closer to pain. We cannot move away from good without moving closer to bad. We cannot move away from helpful without moving closer to harmful. Every time we violate God's standards, we harm ourselves. That is one of the reasons God hates sin. It hurts His children. (Max Anders)

Ask yourself, if you spent a proportionate amount of time practicing basketball as you do working at being a better Christian, would you be on the starting five? Would you even be on the team? If you spent as much time practicing the piano as you do working at being a better Christian, would you be able to conduct a decent recital? If you spent as much time painting as you spend working at being a better Christian, would you be able to do more than draw stick figures? (Max Anders)

No man has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget in his own ease the service due to his neighbor; nor has any man a right to be so immersed in active life as to neglect the contemplation of God. (St. Augustine)

Love, joy, and peace are never gained by pursuing them as ends in themselves; they are the by-product of the pursuit of God above them.

Scripture calls us to order our life priorities to reflect the pursuit of loving relationships. (Max Anders)

It is not what we do as believers that determines who we are; it is who we are in Christ that should determine what we do.

We try to base our spiritual growth and maturity on practical sections of the Scriptures and spend too little time internalizing the doctrinal sections. (Neil Anderson)

Jesus' relationship with His disciples preceded His assignment to them. Discipleship is being before doing, maturity before ministry, character before career. (Neil Anderson)

Discipleship requires mental discipline. People who will not assume responsibility for their thoughts cannot be disciplined. (Neil Anderson)

If you lack assurance of your acceptability and worth, the temptation is to try to earn approval both from others and yourself by your own efforts. The easiest way to go about this is by doing additional things for them. This is one reason why people take on so many extra tasks and responsibilities that God never required of them. This is why some continue to do more in their churches than they really need to. This is why many Christians find it difficult to say "no" to demands made of them by their fellow believers. (Robert Banks)

No longer does time possess value because of the opportunity it offers to discover, appreciate and share the essential human experiences which make up the kind of life God has given us. Instead it becomes dominated by, and traded off against, a different set of things or values which are first produced and then consumed in time. A day becomes prized not because it opens up the possibility of working and relating, giving and receiving, thinking and imagining, resting and praying, but for how much can be crammed into it so that goals of less intrinsic worth can be achieved. (Robert Banks)

Failure to appreciate the past ultimately issues in a significant loss in personal identity. A disconnected past leads to a confused present. Only by finding out where we have come from can we discover who we are. Without an appreciation of the past we are aimless, shortsighted and uncertain. (Robert Banks)

The biblical world view provides entry into a new dimension of time which interprets the past, gives direction in the present, and contains possibilities for the future. (Robert Banks)

A genuinely Christian perspective endorses neither a laid-back outlook nor a fast pace, developing instead a measure of each in a fully integrated life. It idolizes neither spontaneity nor organization, but allows room for expression of both when appropriate. It frees us from our enslavement to the clock, but does not ignore the need to sensibly measure time. It

encourages a freer, more flexible approach to life, but not at the expense of inner consistency or public relevance. (Robert Banks)

While we are constantly preoccupied with what it is God wants us to do, He is far more concerned most of the time with who or what He wants us to become. He wants to fashion the right kind of person or group for particular tasks, not rush us prematurely into Bible busy round of activities. (Robert Banks)

We need to look beyond our immediate concerns to ensure that we are keeping our lives “on target” and everything in the right perspective. Once a year we should spend a few days alone re-evaluating ourselves, our relationships and our responsibilities. Breakthroughs in our awareness of what God wants for us, and shifts of gravity in the way we look at life generally, tend to occur during such periods. (Robert Banks)

A program of prayer without faith is powerless. The missing element that is necessary to energize prevailing prayer that binds and casts out Satan is triumphant faith. And the missing element that is necessary to energize triumphant faith is praise—perpetual, purposeful, aggressive praise. Praise is the highest form of prayer because it combines petition with faith. (Paul E. Billheimer)

Intercession is the most unselfish thing anyone can do. (Paul E. Billheimer)

In the Bible, the entire universe, animate and inanimate, is envisioned as one grand chorus of praise to the Creator. (Paul E. Billheimer)

One of the greatest values of praise is that it decentralizes self. The worship and praise of God demands a shift of center from self to God. One cannot praise without relinquishing occupation with self. When praise becomes a way of life, the infinitely lovely God becomes the center of worship rather than the bankrupt self. (Paul E. Billheimer)

The only time one can offer “the sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15) is when things seem to be going wrong, for it is only then that he is called upon to die to his own opinions, choices, and judgment. (Paul E. Billheimer)

Between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think we dare not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and

love that has been given to us, and that we must constantly be looking forward eagerly for the highest good. . . . How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things? (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

The community of the Spirit is the fellowship of those who are called by Christ; human community of spirit is the fellowship of devout souls. In the community of Spirit there burns the bright love of brotherly service, agape; in human community of spirit there glows the dark love of good and evil desire, eros. In the former there is ordered, brotherly service, in the latter disordered desire for pleasure; in the former humble subjection to the brethren, in the latter humble yet haughty subjection of a brother to one's own desire. In the community of the Spirit the Word of God alone rules; in human community of spirit there rules, along with the Word, the man who is furnished with exceptional powers, experience, and magical, suggestive capacities. There God's Word alone is binding; here, besides the Word, men bind others to themselves. There all power, honor, and dominion are surrendered to the Holy Spirit; here spheres of power and influence of a personal nature are sought and cultivated. . . . In the spiritual realm the Spirit governs; in human community, psychological techniques and methods. In the former naïve, unpsychological, unmethodological, helping love is extended toward one's brother; in the latter psychological analysis and construction; in the one the service of one's brother is simple and humble; in the other service consists of a searching, calculating analysis of a stranger. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Human love desires the other person, his company, his answering love, but it does not serve him. On the contrary, it continues to desire even when it seems to be serving. . . . Because spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother. It originates neither in the brother nor in the enemy but in Christ and His Word. Human love can never understand spiritual love, for spiritual love is from above; it is something completely strange, new, and incomprehensible to all earthly love. . . . Human love lives by uncontrolled and uncontrollable dark desires; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the truth. Human love produces human subjection, dependence, constraint; spiritual love creates freedom of the brethren under the Word. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. . . . The mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as do solitude and community. One does

not exist without the other. Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

A Christian community should know that somewhere in it there will certainly be “a reasoning among them, which of them should be the greatest.” It is the struggle of the natural man for self-justification. He finds it only in comparing himself with others, in condemning and judging others. Self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all. My sin is of necessity the worst, the most grievous, the most reprehensible. Brotherly love will find any number of extenuations for the sins of others; only for my sin is there no apology whatsoever. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Our attitude toward sin is more self-centered than God-centered. We are more concerned about our own “victory” over sin than we are about the fact that our sins grieve the heart of God. (Jerry Bridges)

The Psalmist said, “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). To regard wickedness is to cherish some sin, to love it to the extent that I am not willing to part with it. I know it is there, yet I justify it in some way like the child who says, “Well, he hit me first.” When we are holding on to some sin, we are not pursuing holiness and we cannot have fellowship with God. (Jerry Bridges)

We must rely on the Spirit in our putting to death the deeds of the body. . . . But our reliance on the Spirit is not intended to foster an attitude of “I can’t do it,” but one of “I can do it through Him who strengthens me.” The Christian should never complain of want of ability and power. If we sin, it is because we choose to sin, not because we lack the ability to say no to temptation. ¶It is time for Christians to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are “defeated” by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient! It might be well if we stopped using the terms “victory” and “defeat” to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms “obedience” and “disobedience.” When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am

disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may, in fact, be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey. (Jerry Bridges)

Sow a thought, reap an act;/Sow an act, reap a habit;/Sow a habit, reap a character.

God has provided all we need for our pursuit of holiness. He has delivered us from the reign of sin and given us His indwelling Holy Spirit. He has revealed His will for holy living in His Word, and He works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. He has sent pastors and teachers to exhort and encourage us in the path of holiness; and He answers our prayers when we cry to Him for strength against temptation. (Jerry Bridges)

True spirituality is that quality of life in the child of God which satisfies and glorifies the Father. (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

There may be chastisement for the child of God; but there can be no condemnation. (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

The fact of the covenant abides through the faithfulness of God; but the blessings of the covenant may be lost through the unfaithfulness of the saint. (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

One of the human perfections of the Lord Jesus was His complete yieldedness to the will of His Father. He was willing to go where His Father chose; He was willing to be whatever His Father chose; and He was willing to do whatever His Father chose. (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

We are never wonderful saints of whom God may justly be proud: we are His little children, immature and filled with foolishness, with whom He is endlessly patient and on whom He has been pleased to set all His infinite heart of love. He is wonderful. We are not. (Lewis Sperry Chafer)