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Bulletin Articles

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Bible Class Attendance

I stand in utter amazement as to why so many members of the Lord's church neglect our Bible study morning and Wednesday nights. By their lack of attendance these Christians show that they obviously do not attach much importance to studying the Bible together with God's saints. They seem not to know that it has always been characteristic of faithful Christians everywhere to attend and take part in, if at all possible, these periods of Bible study every time the church comes together for such purpose. These sporadic and infrequent Bible study attendees, who purposely fail, refuse and neglect to be regular in attendance, seem not to know that by their actions they are telling the whole world that they are the weak, lukewarm and worldly- minded bunch among God's people.

What? You say you do not attend because you do not like the teachers, and that they are boring and uninteresting. Well, bless your heart! My dear brother and sister, why don't you then become a teacher yourself and help improve our teaching staff? Be good now and set the proper example before us as a top teacher, and we are bound to follow. No, we do not intend to let you lukewarmers use this as an excuse when you yourselves do not and will not teach.

What? You say you never get anything out of our Bible classes, therefore you do not intend to come. Well, my friend, has it ever occurred to you that you do not get anything out of class because you never put anything in?

Do you come to class prepared and in- formed enough on the day's lesson so as to be able to speak up and make intelligent comments and ask questions to prompt interest in the study? If you do not, then we kindly ask you to hush and never to open your mouth again to criticize a boring class of which you are a major contribution. Please do not complain about that which you do not intend to lift a finger to make better.

What? You say that you have little children and that you cannot get up and get ready on time for Sunday morning Bible classes. I do not believe this is a valid excuse, and neither do you. My own mother reared four kids and never missed a worship service. Nor do I ever remember being late for Bible study the whole time I was growing up. Thousands of other godly men and women can testify that their parents reared them the same way. The problem you have is that your priorities are not in the right order. Here God has blessed you with

precious children and given you the responsibility of bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Then you turn right around and rob them of the most important thing you could ever help your children attain--spiritual development. I would be ashamed to even call myself a Christian parent if I were not interested in the spiritual welfare of my own children!

What? You say you do haphazardly attend Bible classes but when you do, you are never on time but always a few minutes late so as to interrupt the class in progress; you never bring a Bible because you don't know what we are studying and really could care less; you also never bring your workbook and never make one syllable of preparation in study that you might learn some of God's Word. Rather, you say, you just come to whisper, have fun and giggle with your friends on the back row; and, of course, you tell me that your infrequent attendance does wonders to help soothe your guilt-ridden conscience. Sound like anybody you know?

If you, my brother or sister, are not faithful in attending Bible study, how then can you think of yourself as letting your light shine a proper example to others? How then can you be seeking first God's kingdom? And how can you say that your best interests are for the welfare of the church here? Brethren, let us seriously think on these things.
Stephen Wiggins

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As the new year approaches, let us consider seriously the following by Randy Kea, via "The Bulletin Digest" and Marietta, OH.

How Am I Doing?

We are constantly asking each other questions like, "How are you?", "How are you feeling?", etc. Most of the time we mean "How are you physically?" A more important question would be, "How are you doing spiritually?" Let us ask ourselves these questions:

1. Am I growing spiritually? As time passes, God expects and requires us to grow as Christians (I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:18; Hebrews 5:12-14).

2. Do I have any unforgiven sins in my life? Have I failed to ask God's forgiveness (I John 1:7-9)? Have I failed to ask my brethren to forgive me if my sin is against them (Luke 17:3; James 5:16)?

3. Do I look forward to going to heaven? Is my treasure in heaven or on earth (Matthew 6:19-34; Colossians 3:1-3; I John 2:15-17)?

4. Do I look forward to worship and Bible study? (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42)

5. Am I concerned about the souls of others? (Luke 19:10; II Thessalonians 1:6-9;

Matthew 28:18-20)

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be

in the faith; prove your own selves.

Know ye not your own selves, how

that Jesus Christ is in you, except

ye be reprobates?" (II Corinthians 13:5)

Self-Examination

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Examine your- selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves..."* (II Corinthians 13:5). It is much easier for us to examine the other person. In fact, our examination of them is much more critical than an examination of our own self would be. We can easily see the faults of others, but tend to overlook our own, even excuse them. With these thoughts in mind, I would like for each of us to take the following personal evaluation test. We will let each one count for ten points, since there will be a total of ten. Please be honest in your answers, and see just how well you score.

1. ___ I sincerely believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
2. ___ My highest ambition in life is to serve God.
3. ___ I am doing what I can to prepare to be of more use in God's service.
4. ___ I consider the joys and interests of this life small in comparison to the future hope that I have in Christ.
5. ___ I read my Bible daily because God's Word is a source of strength and direction in my life.
6. ___ I speak to God regularly in prayer and bring every care to Him.
7. ___ I attend all of the services of the church be- cause I want to, not because I have to.
8. ___ I have tried to be a blessing to someone this week.
9. ___ I have spoken to a non-Christian about the Gospel during the past week.
10. ___ I am eager to share my material blessings with others, and am looking forward to

such opportunities.

Well, how did you score on the test? Are you satisfied with your grade? More importantly, is God pleased with your score? Are there not areas in which all of us can improve in our daily living? Remember, we not only live before God, but we live with and before our fellowman. We are exerting an influence upon them that is either good or bad. We are either leading them to Christ or away from Christ by our example that we set before them. After self-examination, may each of us determine to make corrections where needed before it is too late. After all, there is coming a time that we are going to be examined by the Lord, but it will be too late then to make corrections. They must be made NOW! As the song says, "Today is the day of salvation, tomorrow may be too late." This, of course, is based on the passage which reads, "... *behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (II Corinthians 6:2).
Virgil L. Hale

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Remembering to Say Thanks

"Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD, he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we re his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100).

During the last few years of his life, a well known theology professor in Scotland lost all memory of his past. While remaining cordial to former university colleagues who came to visit, he had no idea that they had taught together and were close friends for many years. But despite his memory loss, he never forgot to say thanks to God.

One friend recalled that whenever a member of the nursing home staff brought some bread, butter and tea, the professor would exclaim, "This calls for a prayer!" Then, bowing his head, he would say with deep feeling, "Praise God forever and ever. Amen."

Is thankfulness ingrained that deeply in our hearts? While our minds are intact, are we developing the habit of saying thanks to God? One way is to begin by reading Psalm 100, aloud. Why not do it morning and evening for a week as you begin and end each day? "*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise*". *Be thankful to him and bless his name (V.4)*. With meaningful repetition the practice of saying thanks will become the habit of our hearts.

We have little control over what we may forget in our later years, but today we can remember to say thanks and bless God's name.

(DCM, via Round Knob c/C, Austinville, VA).

Can We Face the New Year with Optimism?

Optimism is such a wonderful concept. It represents the best in all things. Faithful and dedicated children of God are very optimistic people. They always hope for the best, believe the best and work for the best! It is always a joy to be around optimistic people.

Jesus was an optimistic person. Read the beatitudes in Matthew 5-7. These chapters ring with a positive attitude toward life! Jesus said, "... *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10b). Again Jesus declared, "*I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*" (John 11:25, 26).

The Apostle Paul was a person of optimism! He declared, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13). This precept represents the foundation of all good attitudes in Christianity! Again, the apostle declared, "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*" (Philippians 4:8).

Optimism is not a blindness to what is reality! It is the recognition of reality coupled with the belief that things can and will be better! It is the realization that God is in control, and He will make all things right! God is the eternal optimist. He believed in the best in man! He planned for the best, and He gave the best for mankind! God has always believed in us and wanted us to be with Him forever!

Christians have a reason to look upward. In the book of Romans we have a passage that challenges us to a deeper appreciation of the spirit of optimism. "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:35-39).

Facing the future with optimism, let's work for success! Let's believe the best in each other. Let's remember that we are involved in the greatest work in the world! We are serving God, and we will succeed!

Allen Ashlock via "The South Florida Avenue Messenger"

"I am always suspicious of profound explanations of the Scripture, explanations that require a scholar or philosopher to understand them. The Bible is a plain man's book (Matthew 11:25). In at least ninety-nine cases in a hundred the meaning of Scripture lies on the surface -- the meaning that any simple-minded man, woman or child who really wants to know and obey the truth would see in it."

R.A. Torey

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Family Spiritual Evaluation

The new year is upon us. It amazes me that the 2002-2003 school year is half over. It seems like we had our parents meeting to kick off the school year just a few days ago. The adage rings true: time flies when you're having fun.

Every year many start the new year with resolutions. Some want to lose weight. Some want to manage their finances better. There are many things we want to change, and the new year seems to be a good time to start making changes. This is true for the world, but it is also true for the Christian.

At the start of the school year, I passed out a sheet titled, "Family Spiritual Evaluation." The purpose was to evaluate each person in your family for the purpose of spiritual growth. My question to you is this: Have the members of your family grown spiritually in these past five months?

As you read the following thoughts, please evaluate your family. Recognize areas where you have grown. Recognize areas where you need help. Make one of your New Year's Resolutions to be spiritual growth for each member of your family.

"Come" level. This person comes to worship, devotionals and Bible studies only when there is something that interests him. This person is looking for entertainment and fun. We shouldn't look down upon this person. On the contrary, we need to help him up. We need to teach him the joy the Christian has in worship and service to God (Romans 12:12).

"Grow" level. This person will come to worship, activities, devotionals, workdays and Bible studies, but he does not seek them out. This person will be present at services and at regularly scheduled Bible class, but will probably not attend a gospel meeting (here or in the brotherhood). Many people are in this group. We need to teach this group to move from being pew warmers to being active in seeking to study, to serve and to teach (James 2:14-26).

"Seeker" level. This person seeks to study God's Word through his own initiative. This person will attend meetings, Bible classes and activities throughout the brotherhood. This person loves God's Word and desires to know it better. We need to help this person put their desire to work helping others. We need to help this person become a teacher (II Timothy 2:2).

"Worker" level. This person takes the initiative for his own spiritual growth and for the growth of others. This person encourages others to attend Bible study and worship. This person loves the church and has made it a priority in his life. We need to help this person to become a teacher. We need to help this person to do personal work. We need to help this person share his passion for the Lord (II Timothy 4:15).

"Teacher" level. This person has love for the lost and desires to seek to teach them the truth (Matthew 28:19-20). This person wants to teach others God's plan of salvation, God's plan for the church and God's plan for Christian living. We need to support those who teach and preach the world over. Our world needs fathers and mothers who will be teachers at home. The church needs faithful Christians who will teach the gospel.

New Year's Resolution: I will grow spiritually, and I will help others to grow spiritually. I will study, pray, serve and teach others. Will you join me?

Denny Wilson via "The Eisenhower Edifier", Odessa, TX, edited)

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever."

II Peter 3:17-18

Who Left the Lights On?

Passing the church building one Sunday evening where they had attended morning services, the little girl of "Christian" parents exclaimed, "Look, Daddy, somebody left the lights on!" Later, at home, they decided they had better start attending the evening services -- not only to satisfy the curiosity of their little daughter, but their own consciences as well.

If you passed the building on Sunday or Wednesday evenings, would your children wonder who left the lights on? Congregations have coaxed, persuaded, tantalized and rewarded trying to get church members to attend services. They have tried banners, seals, diplomas, potluck dinners and attendance drives to induce people to do what they would do anyway if they really loved God.

But people go where they want to go. Because where their hearts are, their heels follow. When we get our hearts right with God, then all these things will not be necessary to try to get people to attend worship as they should. When our hearts are right, there will be more feet at the house of the Lord.

A. Gardner

I was glad when they said unto me,

Let us go into the house of the LORD."

Psalm 122:1

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Management or Sales?

We live in a result oriented society. We want to see the benefits of our labors and have set our own standards by which they are to be measured. We have brought this spirit into the church. We want to see results, and we are inclined to measure them only in responses, increases in membership or by attendance figures.

These things are spiritual indicators to be sure, but they do not reflect God's point of view. In fact, in our insistence on results we sometimes find ourselves in open opposition to His will. A renowned evangelist wrote that it was one of the most important lessons of his life when he finally realized that God was in management and he was only in sales. This is simply saying that he had been trying to take over the prerogative of God in deciding on the results, rather than doing his own part well. I am afraid this characteristic is too often seen in the church.

Noah preached one hundred twenty years without a response. What if you had been on the "pulpit committee"? Do you not know he got discouraged? In our modern way of thinking we would have to judge him a failure, but God had a different point of view. He declared him to be a *"preacher of righteousness"* (II Peter 2:5).

Paul established no congregation in Athens (Acts 17). He preached his heart out and left seemingly utterly dejected, at perhaps one of the lowest

points of his career. What if you had been on the "missions committee"? Would you not have been looking for someone else to support? Yet his sermon on Mars Hill still stands as one of the greatest sermons ever preached.

Philadelphia was a congregation without blemish (Revelation 3:7-13). She was the only one of the seven churches of Asia to receive unmixed commendation. But why? Not great numbers, for all admit she must have been very small. Not because of a liberal budget or an admirable growth rate, but because she was faithful. How could anyone have compared this congregation to Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth or Ephesus? Yet, in the eyes of the Lord, the

church at Philadelphia apparently was one of the greatest churches in the New Testament.

Changing our way of thinking is not going to be easy. We have been caught up on results too long. But in God's sight Noah was a better preacher than Apollos, when Apollos was getting all the responses in Acts 18. Paul was not a failure in Athens because he was preaching the message as God wanted it preached. Philadelphia was a greater congregation than those with many times her attendance, because God is more concerned with our faithfulness than with numbers. Jack Gray

via The Edgewood Bulletin, Columbus, GA

Be Not Deceived

Each of us must face the consequences of our actions. God gives us the freedom to make choices, but He certainly does not approve of every decision we make. One who thinks he can live however he wants to live, and God is somehow obligated to accept him, is truly deceiving himself, *"for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7).

In the natural world we reap what we sow (Genesis 1:11). So it is in the spiritual realm: *"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap*

life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8). That is not our opinion, that is what the God of heaven, the Judge of all, says about it. He who lives by the lust of the flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21), but he who lives by the Spirit's teaching, the gospel of Christ, shall inherit eternal life (John 5:29).

The choice is ours. We can either live with Christ, which means living by His will, or we can live against His will and without Him (Matthew 12:30). However, let us not deceive ourselves. Where we will spend eternity will be determined by our decision to either sow to the Spirit or to the flesh. May God help all of us to heed His warning, *"Be not deceived..."* (Galatians 6:7).

Roger Campbell via "Bulletin Briefs"

When We Hold Grudges...

We defy God's command (James 5:9).

Christ cannot be "all in all" to us (Colossians 3:8-11).

We will stir up quarrels (Proverbs 10:12).

We will try to cover it with lying lips (Proverbs 10:18).

We cannot rightly rebuke sin in others (Luke 17:3).

We speak evil of others (III John 10).

We cannot speak peaceably to others (Genesis 37:4).

We encourage others to do wrong also (Romans 1:31-32).

We lose the joy of child-likeness (I Corinthians 14:20).

God judges us and condemns us (James 5:9).

Norman Gipson, via Parkersburg, WV

Some Ways to Increase Your Involvement

Realize that the invitation to the whole congregation to participate in a program includes YOU -- Don't wait for a personal invitation to get involved.

Assume there aren't enough to do the job, and that you are needed -- Have some self-confidence that the program will be even better with your help.

Don't use excuses for not participating -- "I'm too young/old"; "I've done that before, it's time for someone else to get involved"; "I've married a wife and can't do it" (Jesus said that some people would use that last excuse - Luke 14:20 - one excuse is as good as another).

Realize your perceived lack of talent in an area can be overcome by trusting in God -- Each of the men in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 were asked to stretch and grow, to come out of their comfort zone.

Remember, as a Christian and servant in God's kingdom, we should first think, "It's my privilege to serve." -- Don't leave everything to just a few people.

Think about all the worthwhile aspects of the program -- Then think about how you can make it work even better.

Don't let fear (of failure, of branching out, of whatever) limit you -- Don't allow the devil to use this to deceive you and hinder the growth of the church.

May we have the attitude of Isaiah, "*Here I am! Send me!*" (Isaiah 6:8)

Russell Tarple

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Great Leaders

To the average person the idea of becoming a servant is repugnant. Who wants to be a slave? The world's measure of servitude labels it as debasing. But in the Lord's church it is beautifully different. "... *But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant*" (Matthew 20:36).

The ultimate worth of any congregation, either to its members or to the community, lies in the serving quality of its leadership. Congregations that have leaders who view themselves as servants can be a moving force for good in the community. In a day when selfishness and self-centeredness is the common fare, a congregational leadership that really cares about people has a valuable place. Moreover, every member should do everything they can to make their work a joy. "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you*" (Hebrews 13:17).

If a church is thriving or dying, it is doing so primarily because of its leadership. They have a tremendous responsibility to see that the church is fed spiritually. "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind*" (I Peter 5:2).

Furthermore, elders are to be examples and not only administrators; they are to be leaders rather than commanders. Elders who really lead must bring to the office certain qualities which will induce the church to support their decisions with willing and happy obedience. They should strive to encourage others to follow, not because of who they are, but because of what they are. Congregations thus led seem to grow, prosper and thrive. The church that has leaders who serve has members who serve. The demands for excellence in leadership are exceedingly great. One who serves in the capacity must possess qualities of character that are not common among mankind. Leading with the attitude of service rather than being a ruler is perhaps one of the most valuable qualities.

Perhaps when an elder looks back over his years of service, maybe the greatest joys will be those times when he gave himself freely in the spirit of love for the welfare of the sheep he shepherded. The selfless servant is truly a great servant. He becomes great by not trying to become great. He becomes great in the hearts and lives of his peers by becoming servant of all. All of the success formulas have it backwards. Elders become great by serving. They leave their monuments engraved, not on stone, but on our hearts. May God continue to bless those faithful men who love and watch for our souls, as they do so realizing they must one day give account.

Johnny Burkhart

"The Informer", New Albany, MS

A Church Cannot Be Built -- Upon Leftovers

God is FIRST! He will not be second! God has priority. If God is, and He is... If I am a man, and I am -- then God is right, wisdom, relevant, able! This means I need God totally. The reality of God demands the best, the first, the total.

"What we are doing at church is not working!" This statement is false, false, false. Anything will work when people work! NOTHING will work when people don't. Our problem is not that our programs have failed -- we have failed our programs. Brethren are doing "nothing"! Nothing always fails!

We are "too busy". Brethren come in late to class and leave worship early. We fuss at God about having to give "one hour" on the "Lord's Day". We come unprepared, do not participate, only to leave saying, "We didn't get anything out of it." Leftovers!

Brethren are "out of town" two-three times monthly. Here/there! "Week-ending is killing the church." Forget the evening services, special meetings. We don't have time to be elders, deacons, teachers, designated servants. Leftovers!

Yet this is not the real tragedy! Underneath (inside), we no longer believe "God works". He is extinct like a dinosaur. We need a new god, a new Bible, a "little of this and a little of that". These other things matter more!

People always make time to do what they want to do. People always make time to do what they think will improve their lives. In-depth Bible study, prayer, church are "out of date". Other things are more important. No wonder local preaching is so difficult -- "Preacher, build us a great church on leftovers." Leftovers cannot build anything -- especially the church.

Charles Hodge
via Beltline c/C "Beacon", Decatur, AL

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Admission Is Not Repentance

Sometimes in our dealing with people, we will discuss things with them, and they will make an admission about themselves. It may go something like this: "I know I am quick-tempered..." or "I know I lie..." We could continue this list almost indefinitely. The fact is, we hear admission of undesirable (even sinful) behavior quite often. But we see change in that behavior far less often than we hear the admissions. Why is that?

An often-used phrase is, "Confession is good for the soul." For the most part, this is true, for when one confesses, there is an indication of self-examination and realization of fault. Without such there can be no change brought about. But too many times the admission is just to appease the ones to whom the confession is made. From events that follow, people are able to see that change is not made. Indeed, the confessed behavior may even be

reinforced.

It is all too easy to tell people things that they want to hear. We perceive that someone thinks we are too quick-tempered, so we admit we are. We know we gossip, so we admit it. We get caught in a lie, so we admit it. But, the behavior persists unless we change. Change takes resolve, and resolve must start in the heart (Proverbs 4:23; 23:7).

God knows repentance can only be brought about with sorrow, confession, plus change. Paul was inspired to write, *"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death"* (II Corinthians 7:10, NASB). We may say one thing and do another. But when one backs up confession with a change in action, repentance is evident to all.

Society is filled with people who are willing to admit faults, but not to change. Those who would follow God must be different--we must not only admit wrong, but change. Granted, we all have character flaws (some of which are not sinful); however, when we are confronted with obvious sin, we must not only admit it, but change the behavior.

Are you aware of sin in your life? Admit it--to yourself and to others, if needed, and follow that admission with change. *"Therefore, confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed"* (James 5:16, NASB Lance Cordl

Setting Up Ebenezer

An appreciable portion of ancient Israel's history could be traced throughout the numerous stone memorials they erected, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes under God's direction. The stones were to commemorate significant events in their history. The prophet Samuel set up such a stone on one occasion and called it "ebenezer", stone of help. *"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named Ebenezer, saying, 'thus far has the Lord helped us'"* (I Samuel 7:12). The stone was set up to remind Israel of how much God had blessed them. It was intended to cultivate gratitude.

I don't know about you, but when I take time to think about it, I am very much aware that I, too, need to set up a few "Ebenezers". It need not be anything fancy. It doesn't have to have any significance for anyone but me. Just some slight jogging of the memory to say, "Thank you, Lord, for bringing me this far; I could never have made it without you."

I am not sure just what kind of Ebenezer I should raise up to the Lord. Somehow heaps of stones along the freeway don't seem too practical. Perhaps when I pause long enough to thank God for healthy limbs and good eyesight, a fitting commemoration would be a visit to someone who lacks these blessings. Perhaps when I stop to consider how rich I am in material blessings, I could make an extra special contribution to the church which no one knows about but God and me. Perhaps when I consider how very empty my life would be without Jesus and His gospel, an appropriate gesture of gratitude would be to share that gospel with someone who has yet to hear. It may be important as the fact that I do something to show that I am truly grateful.

If you haven't raised any "Ebenezers" lately, why not stop right now and make your own list. None of us are bad off but what we can say: "Thus far has the Lord helped us."

"Here I raise my Ebenezer:

Hither by Thy help I've come;

And I hope by Thy good pleasure

Safely to arrive at home."

James Draper

Don't Give Up!

A lady in church who invited her neighbor to go to services with her kept count of the times the neighbor refused. It came to 49. She pleasantly mentioned the count to her friend as she issued her fiftieth invitation at the time of a special meeting. At first the friend declined again, but later called and said she would go. "If you're interested enough in me to ask me 50 times to go, I will go with you and see what it is like." She went and liked what she saw. She returned and was converted -- all because someone did not give up too soon.

via Central c/C "Communication from Central", Dennison, TX

"Therefore by beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoved, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord -- I Corinthians 15:58

Quittin ' Meetin

One old preacher used to have "quittin" meetings during his gospel meetings. He gave people opportunity to confess their sins and repent. Many quit swearing, drinking, smoking, gossiping, etc. He asked one woman what she planned to quit, and she replied, "I ain't been doin' nothin'", and I am to quit it! Confessed the sin of omission.

Could it be that some of us have been doing nothing and need to quit doing it and start doing something? *"Therefore, to him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).*

via "The Daily Bread"

Food for Thought

When my body dies, where am I going to live?

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

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A "Life-History" of Half-Hearted Commitment

I tried to be an elder, and example to the flock:

To have a faith unshaken and founded on the Rock.

But I saw I wasn't perfect in the public eye,
So, 'twas easier to quit than it was to qualify.
I tried to be a deacon; to be a credit to the church;
To give up all bad habits and leave them in the lurch.
I found it hard to do, not matter how I'd try:
I found it easier to quit than it was to qualify.
I tried to be a teacher, and teach as in a school;
To teach without much study and the pupils try to fool.
But the class began to dwindle, and I knew the reason why. . .
" 'Twas easier to quit than it was to qualif
I tried to be a Christian, and live as I should live;
I tried to be unselfish, and give as I should give.
It took time and sacrifice, and yet, I thought I'd try;
But I found it easier to quit than it was to qualify!

The great need for faithfulness must be constantly kept before the church. *"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord"* (Matthew 25:21).

Faithful in attendance: An obvious area of faithfulness is attendance. Proper commitment to God's service will guarantee faithful attendance (Hebrews 10:24-31).

Faithful in giving: Giving opens the door for more blessings (Acts 20:35). Giving grows first out of faithfulness (II Corinthians 8:1-5).

Faithful in service: Christians should serve like Jesus. Remember the lesson of service taught with a towel (John 13:1-16).

Christians must be faithful in attendance, faithful in giving, faithful in service. God

blesses the faithful (Revelation 2:10).

Charles Box

Important Bible Truth About Sin

Sin is the transgression of God's law: *"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness"* (I John 3:4).

Sin is knowing what is good and not doing it: *"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

Satan is the source of sin: *"But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"* (Acts 5:3).

All accountable people have sinned: *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

We are not born astray, but we go astray: *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6).

Sin is not inherited: *"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself"* (Ezekiel 18:20).

Sin's penalty is death: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Man is a sinful creature. His sins separate him from God. Because man has been un-godlike, it was necessary for Christ to die in our place. Jesus' death provides man's salvation. *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

Now is the time to obey God. *"For He says: In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (II Corinthians 6:2).

Charles Box

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Are You Manning Your Station?

The burial detail at Bataan found this poem on a 19-year old lad from Indiana who lost his life in a bloody battle:

And if our lines should sag and break,
Because of the things you failed to make,
That extra tank, that ship, that plane,
For which we waited all in vain;
Will you then come to take the blame?
For we, not you, must pay the cost,
Of battles you, not we, have lost.

This is a burning indictment of industrial absenteeism, and how right was that lad! At Bataan many lives were lost for the failure on the home front

But we are concerned with the Army of the Lord. Around us, millions die without hope because we do not finish the means of their salvation. We haphazardly study God's Word. We miss Bible study and worship. We half-heartedly work at our jobs. We give too little. Our vision is limited. And this neglect, this absenteeism, this idleness causes a dark blot on the church. It is the taproot to almost every weakness and failure. The "world at its worst needs the church at its best." Let's all pitch in and do our part! Eldred Stevens

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How to Have a Great Gospel Meeting

Our gospel meeting is seed sowing time. It is our opportunity to teach God's Word and sow the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11).

Our gospel meeting is a time for harvest. It is a time to expect results from the seed that has already and is being sown. We are looking for decisions to be made and for lives to be changed that will affect this generation and those to follow.

Our gospel meeting is an all-out effort to honor God, win souls, encourage the faltering, guide the young and mold character. We believe even one soul is worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26).

Our gospel meeting is important. In this case, there is no such thing as wasted effort, just wrong ideas as to what constitutes success. When the truth is preached, meetings always do good in the sight of God.

Our gospel meeting is a time for prayer. The seriousness of our undertaking calls for daily prayers.

Our gospel meeting is a time for praise, both sung and spoken. We will praise God and give honor to whom honor is due.

Our gospel meeting is a time for personal growth. We will get an understanding of our shortcomings and needs.

Our gospel meeting is a time to broaden our horizons. We need a vision so broad as to include the full range of unsaved souls. They are all in need of salvation.

Our gospel meeting is a time that requires our best. If we honor God, seek the lost and encourage the saved, it will take the best we can give. Each one needs to make plans to see that nothing interferes with attending and supporting the services. Every member is needed every time.

What Can We Do?

We can make it a point to mention the meeting in our conversations whenever possible.

We can hand out the printed advertisements that are available.

We can attend every service possible and pray each day that the greatest amount of good can be accomplished.

We can make a serious effort to arrange to bring others to the services. What we have is worth sharing.

We can talk about this effort positively. We can tell others about the truths we have been taught and about the encouragement we have been given by the things we have heard.

We can take courage when we see our brethren working together for the success of the meeting.

We can keep in mind that God may see success where we may not see it.

Let's resolve to make this a great gospel meeting in God's sight! See you at the meeting!

Gene Stilwell, "The Reflector", Warner Robbins, GA

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The Challenge of a Gospel Meeting

A gospel meeting is a challenge to our faith in the power of the gospel. Do we believe

that the gospel will save men? Do we believe it has the power to change the lives of men? Are there people whom we feel that the gospel would not do any good? If so, it is an indication that we do not believe the power of the gospel. If we do not believe that the gospel has power enough to change the lives of men, then we might as well not have the meeting.

A gospel meeting is a challenge to every member of the church to work. Nothing will succeed without work. This is true of a meeting. We have drifted into thinking that a meeting can be successful by just running an ad in the paper and making a few announcements. These things should be done, but they will not take the place of every member working for the meeting. If the meeting is not worth working for, it is not worth having.

A gospel meeting is a challenge to our interest. Our meeting will show where our heart is. It will separate the sheep from the goats. To be a Christian is to be interested in the lost, and to be interested is to be busy trying to save them by using our opportunities during the meeting. There is something wrong with a person's heart who claims to be a Christian and is not interested in a gospel meeting.

A gospel meeting is a challenge to the devil. It is saying to the devil, "You are in for a fight and we are not giving you an inch." Let us press the battle against him. For too long we have let the devil have his way. Let us meet him on every corner with sword drawn.

A gospel meeting is a challenge to error. Error and false doctrine are the right-hand tools of the devil. The gospel will be preached and error opposed. Let us back it up without fear or apology.

Franklin Camp

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Don't Give Up!

Babe Ruth struck out 1333 times! But we remember him for his 714 home runs.

Abraham Lincoln was badly beaten when he ran for the legislature. He then failed in business and spent 17 years paying off the debt. He failed in an effort to get an appointment to the U.S. Land Office. He was defeated in his race for the Senate, and in his effort to be elected Vice- President. One "set back" after another! But, he eventually became the President of the United States. He was no "quitter"! He had "stickability"

There are many who *"believe for a while but in time of temptation fall away"* (Luke 8:13). Like Israel we have a tendency to forget God (Jeremiah 2:32). In most communities, including ours, there are those who once were more faithful than now. Maybe they do not attend the classes, the night services or other meetings as they once did. They have ceased to participate in the affairs of the local church. Their light has gone out! They have virtually quit! But a winner never quits, and a quitter never wins!

Everyday religion is the antidote to failure. These safeguards will keep us from quitting!

Every day let God say something to you. Keep the line of communication open between you and God by reading and studying His Word (Psalm 1:1-2).

Every day say something to God. Stay in contact with the source of strength by prayer. We cannot walk alone! Prayer avails! (I Thessalonians 5:17).

Every day say something for God. Share the good news! Tell a friend! Speak a kind word! (II Timothy 2:12)

Every day do something for God. Look for opportunities to serve (Matthew 5:14-16).

Clarence DeLoach , J

How Precious the Book

Gustav and his family are at home studying the Bible. Not Bibles for they have only the one. It is their most prized possession. It was exactly three years, four months and two days from the time that Gustav first heard about Jesus Christ that he was actually able to possess his own copy of the Scriptures.

Now that he has his own copy, he and his family take elaborate measures to insure that nothing happens to it. When it is stored in the secret niche in the kitchen wall it is first carefully wrapped in a copy of the Prague, a Russian newspaper, then placed in a sheet of plastic wrapping to keep out all moisture.

This night as they study the Bible for themselves, Gustav and his family delight in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. After hearing the gospel through word-of-mouth, both Gustav and his wife became New Testament Christians. Yet it took four years from that point for a concerned missionary to smuggle him a copy of the Bible through the Iron Curtain. Gustav loves that missionary, not only for the gift of such a wonderful Bible printed in the Russian language, but especially for the fact that the missionary risked his own life to bring it to him.

Gustav and his family are seeking to "grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ", so each night they carefully retract their Bible from its secret resting place, meticulously remove its wrappings and then rub oil into its cover to preserve its longevity. Then Gustav reads aloud of God's love for all men. He is thankful for God's gift. He understands in a special way the "pearl of great price", for Gustav would gladly give his own life that this worn book might remain in his family's possession.

As they read and study together, they remain constantly alert to any outside noises that

might betray the presence of government authorities. Gustav knows that it is illegal to own a Bible, but his faith is more precious than his life. No price is too great to pay for the blessed privilege of sitting each night with the Sacred Pages lying open in his hands.

That same day, in an American congregation, 17 Bibles are left abandoned on the pews to remain un- opened and unused until the next week. Could it be that we do not know what great possession we have in our Bibles? Or could it be that we know and do not care? via the "West Side Worker"

"How precious is the Book divine,
By inspiration giv'n
Bright as a lamp its precepts shine,
To guide my soul to heav'n
It sweetly cheers my drooping heart,
In this dark vale of tears;
Light to my life it still imparts,
And quells my rising fears.
This lamp, thro' all the tedious night
Of life, shall guide my way,
Till I behold the clearer light
Of an eternal day."

L.O . Sanderson c/renewed 19

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How to Find God's Will

How do you find God's will? Henry Drummond says the following eight things are often helpful:

1. Pray
2. Think.

3. Talk to wise people for their advice and counsel, but don't let them tell you what you should do.
4. Beware of the bias of your own will, but don't be too afraid of it. God doesn't necessarily thwart a person's desire. Don't make the mistake of thinking that God's will and what you would like to do are always at odds.
5. Meanwhile, do the next logical thing that must be done. Doing God's will in small things is the best preparation for doing it in great things.
6. When the time of decision comes, act on the knowledge you have.
7. Never reconsider the decision once you have acted on it.
8. Be patient. You may not find out until afterward, perhaps long afterwards, that God was leading every step of the way.

source unknown

Questions to Ask Before You Decide

Sometimes Christians have a hard time deciding what to do in a specific situation that calls for clear decision. Here are some questions to ask, based on specific passages from the Bible, that might help you in finding God's will:

1. Can you ask God to bless your decision (Proverbs 10:22)?
2. Can you thank God for it (Colossians 3:17)?
3. Are you doing this to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31)?
4. Will your decision be a stumbling block to others (I Corinthians 8:9)?
5. Are you doing this to please God rather than people (Colossians 3:23)?
6. Have you thought ahead about the consequences of your decision (Galatians 6:7)?
7. Would you want to be doing whatever you decide when Jesus returns (Matthew 22:44)?
8. Does it promote love (Romans 13:8, 10)?

source unknown

Three Questions

Do you practice what you preach? The Apostle Paul rebuked the Jews for not practicing what they preached. They claimed to be instructors in the law, but they failed to practice the law they preached (Romans 2:17-24). Their failure to practice what they preached caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (V. 24). We need to practice what we preach. Regarding evangelism we cite Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,*" but we do not take

the opportunity to go next door or down the street to evangelize. When the apostles of Jesus failed to carry out their commission to cast a demon from a boy, they caused Jesus to utter the most despairing statement He ever made, "*O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?*" (Mark 9:19). The failure of the disciples also caused the father of the boy to doubt the ability of Jesus. He said, "*But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us*" (Mark 9:22). Our failure to practice what we preach can cause others to doubt the power of the Christ we serve. If the power of the gospel does not appear to change the lives of professed Christians, how could non-Christians expect the same power to change their lives?

Can I preach what you practice? Would you approve? Would the sermon be Biblical? If I preach what you practice, will the be edified? Would lost souls be won to salvation? If I preach what you practice in giving, would the contribution increase or diminish? If I preach what you practice in attendance and in Christian living, would you be honored or ashamed?

Do you preach what you practice? The Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, "*began to both do and to teach*" (Acts 1:1). We must be ready to give an answer to every one who asks us about our hope in Christ (I Peter 3:15). We must tell others why we practice the essential Christian precepts. When we preach what we practice, we are a living illustration of the words we are delivering for Christ!

Wallace Maxwell

via East Corinth c/C, Corinth, MS

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word,

and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 1:22-25

Eloquent Prayer

Eloquence isn't necessarily flowery language so much as heartfelt expression. Consider this prayer of a country preacher in Red Rock, Mississippi:

"Oh Lord, give Thy servant this mornin ' the eyes of the eagle and the wisdom of the owl; connec his soul with the gospel telephone in the central skies; ' luminate his brow with the Sun of Heaven; posses his mind with love for the people; turpentine his imagination; grease his lips with 'possum oil; loosen his tongue with the sledge hammer of Thy power; ' lectrify his brain with the lightnin ' of the Word; put ' pe motion on his arms, fill him plumb full of the dynamite of Thy glory; ' noint him all over with the kerosene oi of Thy salvation and set him on fire. In Jesus' name, Amen."

"... always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will o God" (Colossians 4:12).

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I Am A Newcomer, Won't You Please. . .

Smile at me as I walk in the door. You are my first impression of the church during the first few moments I am in your building, and this first impression will probably stay with me a long time.

Help me find my place in the service. I will not find your help an intrusion. In fact, I will remember your kindness.

Speak to me during the after-service fellowship time. I know you want to see your friends, but I may find it hard to believe that you truly care for each other unless I first see evidence that you care for the *stranger* in your midst.

Tell me good things about the church, your elders, deacons and minister. I want to believe that I have come to a place where people love each other and where they are doing something exciting and important for the Lord.

Notice me even if I am not *family*. I do not want to feel invisible just because I am unmarried, a single parent, a teenager or an older person.

Talk to me again the second week when I come back, and the third and fourth. I am still not a part of your church family.

Invite me to become part of some church activity or small group. I need more contact with the church family.

via Bellview c/C "Beacon", 5/1/

Across the Chasm

Over a deep gorge in Arizona lies a great tree, forming a natural bridge. Ages ago it fell in its prime, apparently a failure. Yet, gradually changed, it is now a tree of solid agate. It has become of noble use and great value, being used by countless human feet to cross the chasm.

On the cross Christ Himself seemed a failure to the eye of man, yet he has become the bridge between earth and heaven on which His re-deemed may pass over. Once rejected--now honored!

"The Biblical Messenger"

Five Things You Can Do to Make This a Better Congregation

--- Tyler Young

Contact someone in the congregation who may need encouragement and invite them into your home or drop by and pay them a visit. Go out of your way to express words of concern to those who may be struggling through trials or who need to be more faithful.

Visit or call one or more of our shut-ins or members who are presently ill.

Take some tracts to distribute to those with whom you work or come into contact on a regular basis. This can be a good way to bring up a discussion of salvation, invite someone to services or offer to study the Bible with someone.

Pray for the congregation; petition the Father on behalf of the preacher, the elders, deacons and members of the body that we might grow and be faithful in all things. Pray that you might be able to contribute more to the work of the church here.

Make it a point to attend every assembly of the church you possibly can--Sunday morning (Bible class and worship), Sunday evening worship, as well as Wednesday evening Bible study and our gospel meeting.

Draw Nigh to Me

What's the natural response when you've seen God? You're convicted of sin. "Woe is me, for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:4). The closer I walk with God, the more quickly I feel my sin and realize how much I need God. It's like a huge mirror with a great big light over it. When we stand away from the mirror, things look pretty good: suit looks in order, tie looks straight; the hair, what's left of it, is combed. But as you begin to move toward the mirror, things begin to show up. The suit has a spot on it. The tie is a little bit wrinkled. The hair is out of place. The closer we get to the bright light, the more we realize our defects.

It's the same way when we get close to God. When we get close to Him, we realize how much we

need Him and how far we are away from Him. We're convicted of our sin.

-- Rod Cooper

("Beholding the King", Preaching Today, Tape #150)

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8; cf. Job 40:4, Psalm 40:12).

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Dressing Properly for Attending Assemblies of the Church

Charles A. Huff, Jonesville, VA

Different modes of dress are suitable for various occasions of our life. Clothing that is acceptable for playing or working may not always be fitting and proper for attending Bible classes and worship assemblies. Clothing that is suitable for small children IS NOT (in most cases) always fitting for those whose stature has reached to a mature stature. Little boys may look fine in knee pants and shorts when we gather. Yet the same style is out of place and immodest for men and teen boys. Little "play suits" with "sun-back" styles and short skirts may be fine for babies and small girls, yet when they begin to grow and develop into womanhood, such would be indecent and immodest. "... *When I became a man, I put away childish things*" (I Corinthians 13:11). While it is true that some "knee-length" shorts and culottes may be as decent and modest as many skirts of modern style; there are occasions when such "casual" style dress is inappropriate. What would you wear to a family wedding or to the funeral of a best friend? Are we not the Lord's bride (Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:22-31; Revelation 19:7)? Do we not also celebrate a memorial of the Lord's death every Sunday (I Corinthians 11:23ff)? I feel that many of us are far too casual in our approach to worship (Hebrews 12:28-29). It matters not whether we have fine clothing or not (James 2:1-8). But, whatever we wear should reflect our sincerity for the occasion. Many a saint of God has worn overalls and calico to worship, but this was the best they owned, they were clean and worn in modest style.

A Christian should never appear in public without proper and decent clothing. Men and boys should wear shirts and at least knee-length pants even to work and play. Women and young women should wear garments that are neither too tight nor too revealing. Far too many children of God are being conformed to the ways and styles of the world (Romans 12:2; I John 2:15-17; James 1:27; 4:4). May we take care that we never bring shame and reproach on the name of Christ.

"...*That women adorn themselves in modest apparel*" (I Timothy 2:9). What is modest apparel? The word "modest" (Greek, *kosmiq*) means: "Orderly, well arranged, decent, modest... it is used in I Timothy 2:9 of the apparel with which Christian women are to adorn themselves... (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p.716); "modest" "... behaving according to a standard of what is proper or decorous; decent; pure; now, especially not displaying one's body..." (Webster's New World Dictionary, p. 946); "modesty" "...the quality of being decent or chaste; not calling attention to one's body; decent..." (Thorndike -Barnhart Dictionary, 1336).

Jesus condemned the "look of lust" (Matthew 5:28). "*The lust of the eye... is not of the Father, but of the world*" (I John 2:16). If we dress or act in such a way as to cause those of the opposite sex to sin by lusting, can we be counted innocent of such sin?

The Power of Prayr

A breath of prayer in the morning
Means a day of blessings sure --
A breath of prayer in the evening
Means a night of rest secure.

A breath of prayer in our weakness
means a clasp of a mighty Hand
A breath of prayer when we're lonely
Means Someone to understand.

A breath of prayer in rejoicing
Gives joy and added delight,
For they that remember God's goodness
Go singing far into the night.

There's never a year nor a season
That prayer may not bless every hour;
And never a soul need be helpless
When linked to God's infinite power.

author unknown

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BE A BETTER STUDENT

Be familiar with the textbook (II Timothy 2:15).
Get to know the Instructor personally (Hosea 6:3; Philippians 3:10; cf. John 8:32).
Take copious notes (cf. Deuteronomy 6:7-9).
Consider the long-term benefits of the study (I Timothy 4:16).
Work on making practical use of the material (Philippians 4:9; cf. Acts 1:1; 10:38).
Be prepared to share your knowledge with others (I Peter 3:15).
Use your knowledge when it is time for tests (James 1:2-5).
Make it personal through dedication (II Timothy 3:14-15).
Study with alertness and zealously to eliminate laboriousness (Hebrews 2:1).

Neal Pollard

Any Room for Improvement?

Ask yourself the following questions (II Corinthians 13:5).
Am I so critical that I see only a person's failure and not his/her good points?
Am I so childish that people must treat me gently lest I be offended?
Am I mature enough to handle hurts and disappointments without feeling mistreated and making everyone else miserable?
Do I hurt people while boasting, "I believe in saying what I think"?
Can I be completely trusted with confidential information?
Am I guilty of making sarcastic remarks about the success of others?
Am I big enough to admit when I am wrong, or do I seek to excuse myself by blaming others?
Do I excuse my sins while self-righteously condemning others?
Are others uplifted and encouraged through their association with me?
Do I follow after peace, or do my words and actions promote strife?

via "The Messenger", Karns c/C, 8/20/

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A Riverboat Recommendation

In his Life on the Mississippi Mark Twain tells of his education as a riverboat pilot. The advice handed down by an older captain under whom Twain was an apprentice is worth remembering. After deliberately letting the young apprentice make a mistake on the dark water, he said, "My boy, you've got to know the shape of the river perfectly. It is all there is left to steer by on a very dark night.... How do you follow a hall at home in the dark? Because you know the shape of it."

This advice seems fitting for the river of life. The true disciple of the Lord needs to know the Scriptures as a river pilot knows the river. He should learn the contours of each book of the Bible--every twist and turn. Such knowledge does not come without mental discipline. It is never gained by the lake side on a Sunday morning nor before the television on a Wednesday night.

Ezra the priest, scribe and teacher was a man dedicated to knowing the contour of God's law. In the seventh year of the reign of King Artaxerxes , some 54 years after th rebuilding of the Temple, Ezra made the 900-mile trip from Babylon to Jerusalem because of this dedication. Ezra 7:10 speaks of his purpose in this complimentary way: *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."*

Four facts appear in the above scripture: (1) Ezra was devoted, for *"Ezra had prepared his heart..."*; (2) he was a disciple, for Ezra's heart was set to *"seek the law"*; (3) he was dutiful, in- tending not merely to seek the law, but *"to do it"*; (4) he was doctrinal, for he intended to *"teach in Israel statutes and judgments"*. May God send us more like Ezra.

Marlin Connelly

What God Has Done with Our Sins

Forgiven and covered them. . . Psalm 32:1

Not imputed them to us. . . Psalm 32:2

Removed them. . . Psalm 103:12

Made them white. . . Isaiah 1:18

Blotted them out. . . Isaiah 43:23

Pardoned them. . . Isaiah 55:7

Cast them into the sea. . . Micah 7:19

Remitted them. . . Matthew 26:28

Took them away. . . John 1:29

Purged them. . . Hebrews 1:3

Cleansed us from them. . . I John 1:9
Cast them behind His back. . . Isaiah 38:17

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What Happened to the Potted Plants?

This story is true--only the names and places have been withheld to protect the guilty! A congregation moved into a new building with gleeful delight and some degree of pride over the elegant surroundings in which they

would worship. Someone supplied two beautiful five-foot plants to adorn the front of the new auditorium.

Some months following the opening service in the new building, to the dismay of the elders and building committee, the plants disappeared. Said elders and said committee sounded the alarm. The congregation was bombarded with announcements. Men were deputized to seek the whereabouts of that which was lost. Apologies were made to the donors of the decorative plants. For two months the missing potted plants became the conversation piece of the church at worship and at home. The search was intensified, and the announcements and pleadings seemed unending.

The quest ended quite abruptly when the local preacher dared to solve the problem. It took nerve to do it! Since the potted plants had not been found and obviously were not going to be, he arose following a long announcement about the lost decorations and said, "We have heard a great deal about the missing plants that were lost. For two months, at every service, announcements have been made, and people have earnestly looked to that which is lost. For years we have known that sheep have strayed from the flock. Prodigal sons are away from the worship, and the Bible declares that they are lost. Each soul missing here today is more valuable than the whole world--yet we have heard not one announcement nor have we seen anxious concern about Mary Smith, John Brown or Sam Jones, whose eternal welfare may hang on our concern. If we had put forward one-tenth the energy in locating the lost souls of this flock that we have the lost potted plants, surely the angels in heaven would rejoice!"

Suffice it to say, not other announcements were made about the plants. O..
Russell

Faith Is. . .

* Reliance on the certainty that God has a pattern for my life when everything else seems meaning- less.

* Remembering that I am God's priceless treasure when I feel utterly useless.

- * Depending on the fact that God is love--not on my ability to figure out why, in the midst of smashed hopes, reversal and tragedy.
- * Keeping on when I'm dog tired, discouraged, disillusioned, deserted, dusty and dry. I cast on His strength alone.
- * Realizing that I am useful to God, not in spite of my scars, but because of them.
- * Confidence that God is acting for my highest good when he answers "No" to my prayers.
- * Accepting the truth that, in spite of the wreck- age and grief I've caused, God has wiped the slate clean and delights in me.
- * Doing the right thing regardless of the consequences, knowing God will turn the ultimate effect to good.

(copied, edited, author unknown)

Rifle or Shotgun?

Imagine two deer hunters coming upon a herd of 20 deer! One with a shotgun suggests he should fire because he could hit almost every one of them. The man with a rifle suggests he should fire. The man with the shotgun will hit most of them but will not kill one. The man with the rifle will let most of them get away, but he will kill one.

We face the same dilemma. We have so many friends we want to reach for Christ--we try to reach them all. The result: lots of "wounded", but no one converted. What to do? Invite everyone to visit with you ("shotgun") but use a "rifle" on one--pick out one special friend to encourage, invite, visit and pray for extensively. Then, as your efforts win trust, patiently teach that ONE the gospel of Christ. Lots of friends may get away... but this is more likely to get real results!

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus..." John 14:41, 42

via Jacksonville c/C, AL

Looking at the Goal

The snow covered the ground, and three young boys were playing in it. A man said to them, "Would you like to try to race with a promise of a prize for the winner?"

The boys agreed, and the man told them that this race would be different. "I will go to the other side of the field," he said, "and when I give you the signal, you will start to run. The

one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner."

As the race commenced, the first boy began looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy just ran on with his eyes fixed on the man on the other side of the field.

The third boy was the winner for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him.

A long time ago, another man using similar words taught the same principle. It was Paul who said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

author unknown; via Bellview "Beacon", Pensacola,

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Ezra 7:10

This one verse contains the four keys that are needed to make man what he ought to be. The verse reads: *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel."*

First of all, every man must prepare his heart. The condition of one's heart will determine how one receives God's saving message. As Jesus taught the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15), He revealed four conditions of the hearer. There are those who hear but refuse to put forth that extra time and effort to come to an understanding. There are those who hear and understand, but fail to become "rooted and grounded" in the Truth; thus, they fall away in times of trial and temptation. There are those who hear and understand, but are so entangled in the riches and cares of this world that they soon fall away. Then there are those who will hear and understand and remain faithful until death. What is the condition of your heart? It will determine how you receive God's saving message!

Second, every man must seek the Law of the Lord. Sadly, rather than seeking the Law of the Lord, the majority of people seek a religion that does not infringe upon their comforts and conveniences! Long ago, the Prophet Jeremiah acknowledged, *"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (Jeremiah 10:23). When a man reads the Bible or assembles for worship service, he must do so with a wholehearted desire to learn God's will--in its entirety and purity. The Apostle Paul tells us that the Gospel of Christ is God's power to save those who believe (Romans 1:16). Luke tells us that there is salvation in none other (Acts 4:12).

Third, every man must put into practice the Law of the Lord. It is not sufficient to have

know- ledge of the Truth, you must make the needed applications. James writes, "*But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*" (James 1:22). No matter the sacrifices, no matter the drastic change required in your life, you must obey and remain faithful to the Word of God!

Finally, ever man must prepare himself to become a teacher. God expects His children to teach (Hebrews 5:12). Paul told Timothy, "... *the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*" (II Timothy 2:2). Look also to Paul's description of the "*servant of the Lord*" recorded in II Timothy 2:24-26. Every Christian must seek to be "*able to teach*"!

David Boren

The Eisenhower "Edifier", Odessa, TX

A Memory System

Forget each kindness that you do - as soon as you have done it.
Forget the praise that falls on you - the moment that you've won it.
Forget the slander that you hear - before you can repeat it.
Forget each slight, each spite, each sneer - wherever you may meet it.
Remember every kindness - to you, whatever its measure.
Remember praise by others won - and pass it on with pleasure.
Remember every promise made - and keep it to the letter.
Remember those who lend you aid - and be a grateful debtor.

author unknown

We Need to Be in the Assembly

"Soon after I obeyed the gospel in the Fall of 1909, I read of an old brother who had not missed going to church a single Sunday in 41 years. That story caused me to resolve and purpose in my heart that I would never miss the worship on a single Lord's day as long as I lived, if possible to attend. I have missed four Sundays in over fifty years, and that was because of illness.

"Once I made that decision, the question has not come up as to whether I would attend church services. In fact, I did not decide last Lord's day to go to services, nor the Sunday before. That was decided over 50 years ago.

"It is a sin for any member of the Lord's church to miss the worship unless he is unable to attend. The very nature of our religion is such that those who feel worship is a burden need to be converted."

Gus Nichols (deceased)

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Who Needs to Confess?

Maybe the reason for lack of more public confessions is because some members are not aware of their responsibility along these lines. Any member of the church who has done wrong in such a public manner that an uncertain number of people know about it, such as drunkenness, revelings, bad language needs to repent, cease the practice of sin and make public confession. A Christian is never humble enough to be forgiven until he is humble enough to publicly take away the reproach he has brought on the church. When persons are ashamed to go before the whole church and make their confession, their repentance is not sincere enough to obtain forgiveness.

No sin among us wrongs more brethren than a failure to attend the public services and to so avow disassociation with the brethren. Certainly one cannot slip back as if nothing had happened when he dropped out of attendance. Christians are commanded to confess their faults (sins) one to another that they may be healed, and they should do so honestly, truthfully and faithfully (James 5:16). Do YOU need to be restored?

Let it be clearly understood that sins of a private nature are an entirely different matter. Private sins should never be publicly confessed! It tends to weaken your influence when you speak of your private sins. BUT, the SIN OF BEING ABSENT FROM WORSHIP CANNOT, under any circumstances, BE CLASSED AS A PRIVATE MATTER!

Whether the member has withdrawn himself from the church, or whether the church has withdrawn from him, it still remains a matter that the bad example and influence should become public, and others warned not to travel the road of indifference, neglect and sin. When a Christian willingly, knowingly and deliberately fails to observe the Lord's appointments on the Lord's Day, that Christian is in sin, out of duty and should make a public confession of the sin, having repented thereof. A failure to do this leaves the church in bad light--and the church must make it known that she does not approve of such disobedient conduct. O, how much the church could do if all members would just do their duty in having their part in all public services of the church. How about you, are you faithful in all things (Luke 16:10-13).

W. Ray Duncan (edited)

Powerful Medicine

A noted doctor has listed several emotions which produce disease in human beings. Heading the list is fear, followed by frustration, rage, resentment, hatred, jealousy, envy, self-centeredness and ambition. The one and only antidote that can save men from

these, he says, is love.

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment..." (I John 4:18a). See also Galatians 5:19-25.

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She Invited Me

I remember the room. I can recall where I sat. The excitement of hearing the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for the first time has not faded. I can still taste the sugar cookies and cherry Kool-Aid we had at break. Others may have long forgotten that VBS class the Summer, but I haven't.

Other teachers taught my VBS classes in previous years, and they poured their lives into that material and those students. They loved, and they cared. But I remember Mary's class for one basic reason.

Most of the kids in the class went to church regularly. I didn't. Most of those children were reared in Christian homes. I wasn't. Most of the others had their own Sunday school class. Not me. I don't remember being different. But I do know why I remember Mary's class. She invited me to church.

Even though I had attended VBS for several years, no one ever helped me to make the transition from Summer VBS to regular Bible school. Mary asked. I came. She taught. I listened.

Like any other church outreach, VBS only works as well as the people in it. VBS Friends' Day, gospel meetings or a host of other church activities all excel when Christians ask.

It wasn't the great study material. It wasn't the cookies and Kool-Aid. That little country church didn't have modern facilities. Nobody had paved the parking lot or carpeted the floor. But one good Christian woman asked a little boy to come back. I'm glad she asked.

author unknown/ via Gloster Street c/C "Messenger", Tupelo,

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Understanding the Bible

Larry Thomas

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). We must understand the Lord's way if we are to have life. Jesus said, "For narrow is the gate and straitened is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it."

they that find it" (Matthew 7:14). Thomas asked Jesus the questions, "How know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto th Father, but by me" (John 14:5-6).

Here are some attitudes you should adopt that will help you to understand the way:

Hunger for truth (Matthew 5:6).

Confidence that you can understand the Bible (John 8:32).

Honesty (Luke 8:15; James 1:23-25).

Humility (James 4:6)

Patience in learning.

Desiring to be saved through Christ (Acts 17:10-11; Romans 6:23).

Learning to live for Christ with heaven as a goal (Galatians 2:20; II Timothy 4:7-8).

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What Keeps You from Bible Study?

Have you heard about William McPherson? A dynamite charge blew up in his face. Damage was severe. He lost his hands. Part of his face was left numb. Realizing how much the Bible meant to him, he set out to find a way he could read it. Without hands, he tried to use his lips to read Braille, but numbness made that impossible. He discovered he could use his tongue to decipher the Moon Type system of dashes. This method left his tongue bleeding and very sore, but he kept at it. Gradually it became easier, and he learned to read. In sixty-five years he was able to read the Bible through four times with his tongue.

Now, what is keeping you from reading and studying the Bible? Is it the TV schedule, ball games or other self-interest that prevents you from reading the Bible daily? Are these things really the problem? The story of William McPherson makes it clear that we do what we want to do. The one who will not read has no advantage over the one who cannot read.

via the Plainview c/C *Proclame*

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