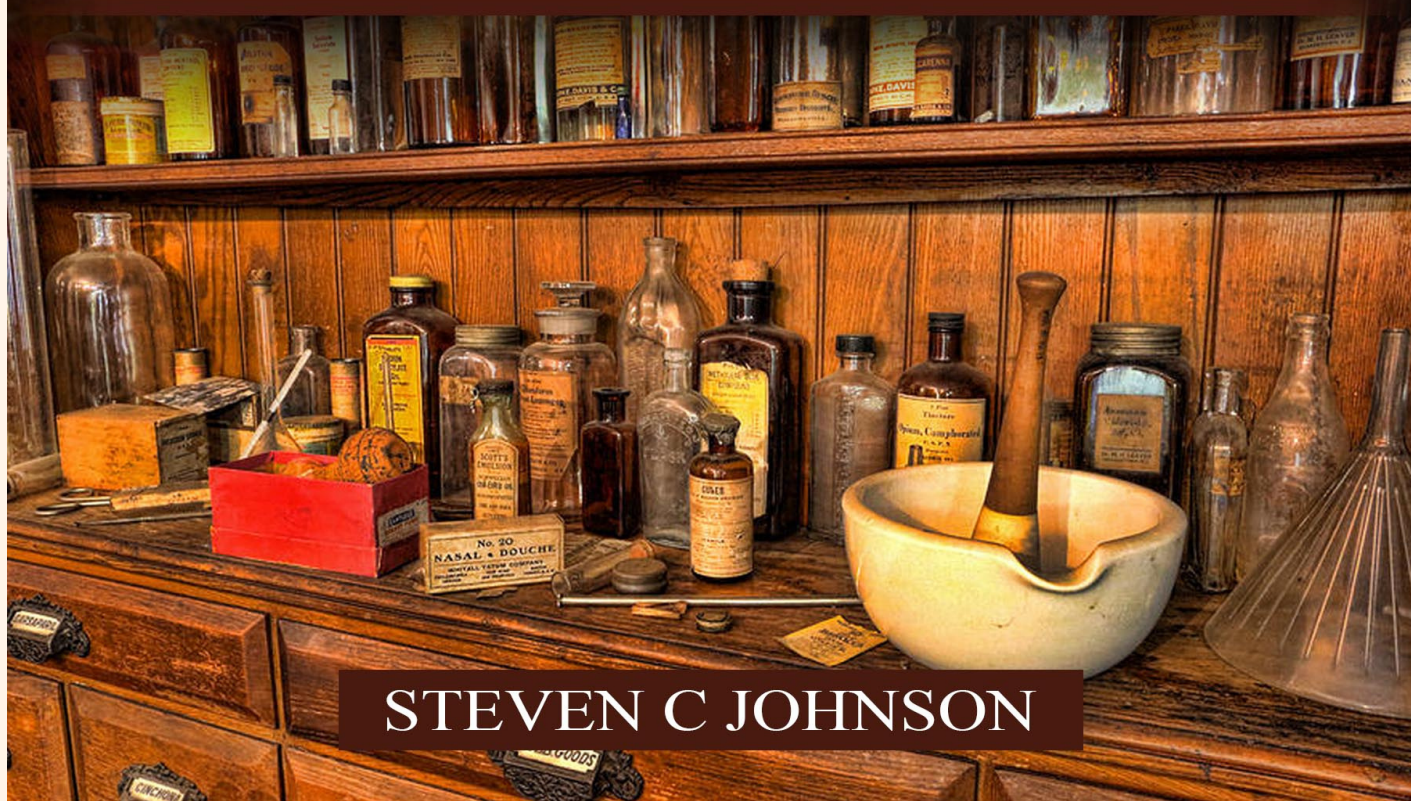




# COMPOUNDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT



STEVEN C JOHNSON

# **COMPOUNDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

**by Steven C Johnson**

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I highly recommend this book, especially for men who want to up their game as encouragers. The articles are brief, upbeat, tender, and tough. During the past two years, almost weekly, I've been in prayer rooms and men's meetings with Steve Johnson. I've never encountered a person anointed as much as he is with the gift of encouragement (Romans 12:8). And with his comprehensive writing, Steve continually captures his reader's attention with vivid, creative lines. Read this book, one chapter at a time; and if you can, find a way to meet this man!

Geoff Pope

"I found your book to be very encouraging. It calls us to a higher ground. I heard God speaking through the words he gave you to write. I appreciated having his Word to read throughout the book. I especially enjoyed the lessons on wonder, amazement and creativity. I wrote down a quote to pray for friends and family: "May our friends and family who are distant from Yeshua be hit hard by his overflowing kindness, bringing them to true repentance." Also, having a background working with special needs children, I was touched by the pool story about Cain. Thank you for giving me the privilege of reading your book!!"

Liela Cuglivan



# INTRODUCTION

Some cars can run a hundred miles on a gallon of gas. I've met people who can run a thousand with a simple word of encouragement. Encouragement is the gunpowder behind my bullet. I seek and enjoy encouragement from my heavenly Father, and welcome it from friends.

I love to see people brighten, stand taller and tackle bigger dreams after just a sip of support from someone who believes in them. I have never met someone who refused a moment of encouragement. Many are desperate for it!

Over the years family, friends and a few strangers have bestowed cards, emails and news clips as words of affirmation. I keep them in a file. Should I ever think of jumping off the high side of the couch to end it all, I may go to my encouragement file.

If I'm looking for an extra dose of courage, the cabinet pulls out, and the folder comes with it. Pictures of friends and family produce a similar happy fortification.

I honor the passing strangers, family and friends, teachers and pastors, and other intentional and accidental mentors, who by words of encouragement and exhortation, have stretched and expanded me inwardly and outwardly.

May you find here refreshment and inspiration to stimulate hope and high vision!

Steven C Johnson

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## PUPPY LOVE

I was at a flea market and came by a booth selling puppies. They were cute little things in variegated colors and shapes. Some were actively sparring and wrestling. Some were sleeping, even while being stepped on by their siblings.

The lady at the booth had cupped one in her hand and was kissing its tiny head. I said, "God's creatures, great and small." She said, "Yes, they're my babies and I love them."

I walked away with this impression. What if God is taking the same tender delight in us, his tiny creatures? What if God has a case of puppy love toward us and he simply desires to cuddle us and kiss our little noggins?

What if God actually found us dear and darling rather than seeing us as a pile of stale, dirty, unwashed laundry? What if God could look past our poop and see us as cute?

We know from scripture that God is very serious about sin, but He is even more serious about caring for the creatures he has conceived. The puppies were going for \$200 each, but our loving Savior Jesus really splurged and paid quite a lot more for us. He did it, because he found us precious. Perhaps he was overcome with puppy love.





## MY NEW BEST FRIEND

He seemed to have a snarl. He did not look friendly, but rather intimidating. I could have avoided him. Instead I decided to buck up my courage, let my guard down, and talk with him.

As I approached, I coached myself: This could be your new best friend. Then I gave a cheerful, "Hello!"

It might have turned out otherwise, but the man was approachable.

In fact, our chatting ended with the beginnings of friendship. "Great to meet you!" "Likewise!"

When I am about to meet someone for the first time, I endeavor to activate important realities in my consciousness.

O, my Dear God, this is a creature made in your very image!

What a unique and precious work!

Help me to value this person as You do!

This person is certainly my superior in many ways. I'm confident I will learn much from them!

All people are fascinating. What makes this person amazing?

This person could become my new best friend!

There are many titles of distinction, but one of the grandest is "Friend." It's sweet to me when I hear Jesus address a person as "friend."



Jesus prized people dearly. He was awake to their worth! What was Jesus thinking about and anticipating as He began a conversation?

Take up your courage, take a risk and discover the marvel of your new best friend!





## A TRAIN! A TRAIN! A TRAIN!

The lights flashed, the big polls would fold down and the bells would ding! A train was coming! We would jump up and down on the back seat (before seatbelts) shouting, “A train, a train, a train!”

“Count the cars! Look at the shapes, and letters on the side. What’s inside those cars? Where are they going?” We were full of awe and wonder! What happened to that magical delight?

Adulthood sucks out of us the capacity for astonishment. The downgrade attitudes of “Been there, done that, seen that” demonically pillage us of the capacity for amazement. The evil spirits whisper, “The train is boring.” Demons may even shout, “This train is an offense to the god of hurry!”

The thief comes to kill, steal and destroy—the entrancement we find in steam coming off the soup, water ripples in the bathtub and curtains wrinkling in the breeze.

Wonder is the springboard into worship. We live in stark poverty without it. Who will save us and restore the wonder?

The answer comes from Isaiah 11:6: “a little child will lead them.”

Only a child can rescue us! Jesus, of course, was never plundered of His wonderment. Even as an adult, He was able to be fascinated by the birds and flowering grass. He warned adults we would be hopelessly lost without childlikeness.

The prescription is to find a child to teach us the amazing world of flashlights in dark bedrooms, the enchanting fragrances of spices in the cupboard and the way a spider weaves a web. These are things every adult should learn! With remedial help from qualified children, we can recover wonderment.

Look! A train, a train, a train!





## WONDERMENT: THE LAUNCHPAD FOR WORSHIP

Wonderment is the launchpad for worship.

Children are masters at the art of wonder. As we “mature,” the world loses its color. Things become ordinary. Our preoccupations dilute wonderment. We cynically think, “There is nothing new under the sun.”

No “wonder” children often prefer the company of other children over adults. Adults lose their ability to see things for the first time, to see things fresh.

The Scriptures speak of “signs, wonders and miracles.” “Wonder” is always sandwiched between God’s signposts and unique works. I am convinced that as we restore wonder, we will have a vast increase in signs and miracles.

To recover wonder is hard work. It requires a return to childhood, an attitude of innocence, and an eye for the artful, humorous and impossible.

Practice wonderment. It will launch you into the worship of your Creator!





## FINDING CENTER

Recently my wife and I came upon Self magazine. You have to be careful opening it or the images may bite you. I told Pam, “I wonder if there is an Others magazine, and if there were, would anyone buy on

Self will teach you how you can get skinny and sexy, how to dress and style your hair with fashion, how to prepare delicious meals and, of course, give pointers on relationships.

The thing that concerns me is the seductive notion: "Draw a circle around your feet and find the center of the universe."

I read a few of the articles, and they were good. Sometimes we need to be retold, "Exercise, sleep well and eat right." Some people don't take care of themselves and need to be reminded. In some religious circles, self-denial is taught so severely that to take a bath or brush your teeth is suspect.

If you are malnourished, afflicted with an illness or simply run down, by all means take care of yourself. But take serious warning: self-worship is a terrible dead end. Jesus gave us a caution and promise: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:24-26, NIV)

It seems counterintuitive, but denying self and living to please our heavenly Father is the best way to take care of self. If you wish to better honor God, you best optimize your health. If you seek to serve others, you had best seek superior vigor.

The underlying question is, "Who will be the object of my worship?" Two people may pursue the optimization of their minds and bodies, but do so with different motives: one to please the self-god, the other to please the living God.

I did find Self useful for paint papering around the bathroom window today, and the note on the health qualities of olive oil was good as well. God bless the writers of Self and those that read their articles. May we all find the right "Center."



"There are no great limits to growth because there are no limits of intelligence, imagination, and wonder."  
[Ronald Reagan]

## AN ELECTIVE COURSE IN HUMAN IMAGINATION

In my dream, I was going to college. I knew I did not have a heavy class load. I told a classmate it was nice to be in a place where I could take elective classes and said, "I would like to take a class that studies the limits of human imagination."



We human beings are “fearfully and wonderfully made”! I am often astonished at the creativity and innovation that we, the children of dust, are capable of. How does that whiz kid get all those answers? Where did that inventive idea come from? Where did the creativity for solving that enigma descend from?

Being created in the image of God puts us ahead of rocks and trees and things. Wow, what potential God has instilled in us! Do you think he takes delight in our pushing the limits of human imagination? I do!

We know this from passages like Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

God can more than trump any of our outlandish visions with His creative genius.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9-10).

What limits do you suppose have been put on your imagination?

What happens when you push those limits?





## OLD AND PRIMEVAL

For a season we enjoyed delightful times adventuring through the old and ancient history at Camp Barkeley in Buffalo Gap, Texas. Hundreds of thousands of men came through this military camp in World War II. If you have any itching for history, this is a place to get it scratched.

Marine fossils are evidence those heights were once ocean floors. What a day when the earth buckled up and down and the waters became a great mix-master. Balls of mud and sea life tumbled in the tumult, mixing and shattering, forming fossils to inspire wonder.

It is awe inspiring to consider the monstrous tidal waves cutting out great planes, with some of the ocean floors left behind as the new heights. Remnants of truly primeval aquatic life testify to the world that was.

Sooner than later we are going to have a grand history class. God our Father will take out His photo scrapbook or his movie projector, and we will see and hear the greatest stories! They will include important people, such as yourself, woven into His-story. Story time is the best time, don't you think?





## SEASHELLS ON THE MOUNTAINS

In the summer of 1985, I had a real adventure. I was able to join Dr. Jim Davies and his wife Martha on a climb of Mount Ararat in Eastern Turkey, in search of Noah's ark. How can I share the power of that experience?

No, we did not find Noah's ark, but we got to:

- climb a mountain bigger than you can probably imagine
- appreciate the ancient history of a land cleansed by water
- experience culture with Turkish and Kurdish friends, and
- get snowed on in August

We also encountered Kurdish terrorists who courteously did not shoot us but relieved us of our possessions, including that nice SLR camera you see on my neck. That's another story.

One of our delightful surprises was gathering seashells around the base of the mountain. There were countless thousands. We hit the jackpot! Unfortunately, the Turkish government doesn't want them taken.

Seashells on mountains! Don't you think that is fascinating? You may go to Mount Everest and other mountains of the world and find fossilized creatures. Those mountains once were sea floors. When the earth went through the con-tortions of the flood, the plates flexed and twisted like crazy. The waters receded, leaving buckled-down ocean trenches and buckled-up mountain ranges.

You will never witness a possum fossilizing by the side of the road. They simply rot. Fossils are always formed in water-laid sediment under pressure and heat. You find fossils on every continent. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find a nation which has no fossil record. If you have never studied the evidence for a world-wide flood, you owe yourself an edu-cation. It is fascinatingly eerie!

The recipe to create fossils is pretty simple. All you need are:

- The object to be fossilized
- Minerals in the soil to transfer into the object
- Water to conduct the minerals
- Intense heat, and
- A whole lot of pressure!

God kept His word by sending a catastrophic flood to destroy the earth, and He kept His word to preserve Noah and his family. There are quite a few more promises He is about to fulfill! That is why I want to stick really close to the Lord Jesus!

“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Hebrews 11:7, NIV).





## THE RE-CREATOR

The Curse was spoken: “Dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). But that is not the end of the story; it is only the first few pages. The end has the music of billions of angels!

Sin’s consequence is death, but the grace of our Father generates life!

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17, NIV).

It goes this way:

1. God's Bright Idea – Turn dust into mankind! The morning stars sang with wonder!

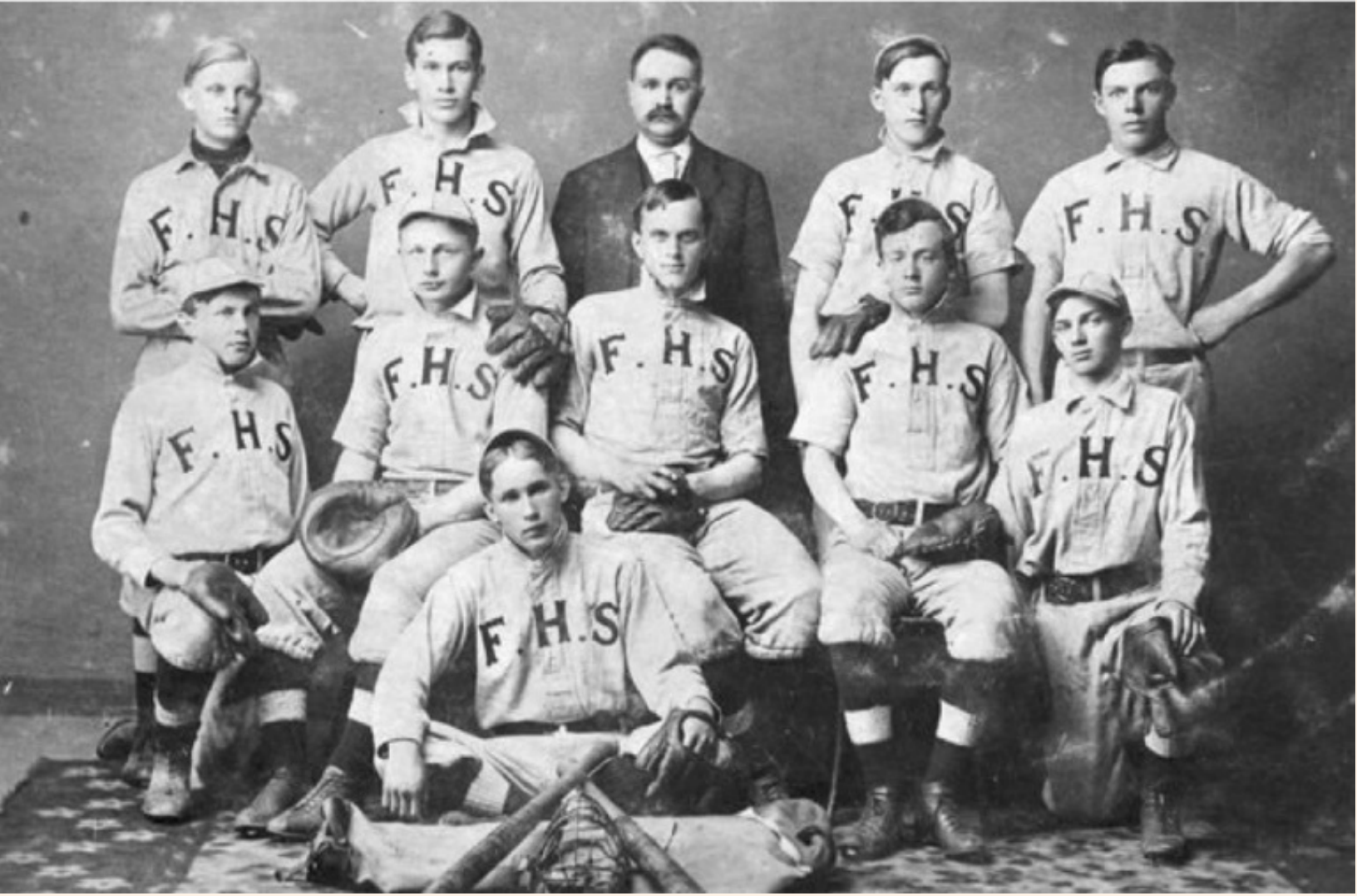
2. Man's Iniquity – Mankind returns to dust. Dreadfully sad!

3. God's Redemption – Reconstituting dust to life again! Rapturous Resurrection!

Picture a house destroyed by fire and turned to ash. The Architect, however, made blueprints so exacting that every measurement, every grain of grout, every precise placement of shingle and nail and door hinge were defined to the finest detail. The exact house could be reconstructed again. Scientists are mapping the human genome. God got a head start on them.

The unrelenting dominion of death will be broken as the CREATOR puts dust, reconstituted dust, together again. This time the dust will never unravel but stay together for eternity!

The heavens will ring again with song, and we will worship the RE-CREATOR!



## ITS PLACE REMEMBERS IT NO MORE

The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.

– Psalm 103:15-16, NIV

The picture is of the Falkner High School's baseball team. Grandpa Johnson is sitting on the floor, and his good

friend Hugh Bedient is sitting in the middle. If I asked today's students and staff at Falkner HS, "Do you remember Leslie Johnson?" they might roll back their eyes and search their memory banks. "Sorry, I don't remember him."

"Oh come on! Everyone knew Leslie! The picture doesn't capture it, but most of the time he was wearing a smile. He was the fun-loving guy everyone liked to be near. Come on, think about it! Leslie was captain of all his sports teams. A really friendly guy! He was especially good at baseball. He couldn't play baseball at the University of Pennsylvania because he played semi-pro after high school."

"Let me think... When did he graduate?"

"Oh, about 114 years ago."

In time, the slightest recollections are gone. It may take a few generations, but in time, the rich, beautiful, villain and virtuous are forgotten.

The names, dates and places may be studied by a few history students, but in time historians lose interest as new history supplants the old.

Our lot is not found in an overgrown, forgotten grave! Our lot is with the LORD! Our loving Father has perfect recall! We are remembered!

Job gives us the first biblical reference to the resurrection of the dead in a prayer.

"If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed!

If only you would set me a time and then remember me!

If someone dies, will they live again?  
All the days of my hard service  
I will wait for my renewal to come.



You will call and I will answer you;  
you will long for the creature your  
hands have made.

Surely then you will count my steps  
but not keep track of my sin.

My offenses will be sealed up in a bag;  
you will cover over my sin.”

(Job 14:13-17,  
NIV)

You, my friend, are remembered!



## WEDDING AND FUNERALS

My pastoral training was missing a few practical elements. When it came time to do my first wedding and funeral, I was flat-footed. I had never had a class on conducting these chapter-turning events. When put on the spot, I struggled to recall weddings and funerals I had witnessed. I looked for scriptures, models and traditional scripts others had used to help me.

In time, I found weddings and funerals some of the most meaningful moments in ministry. Both services were great opportunities to point people to God and his ultimate intentions for our lives. The joys of marriage point us to the ultimate union with Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom. Funerals reminds us of His death, resurrection and the glistening hope we possess.

As Pam and I were reading in our Bible this morning, we saw spiritual allusions to both wedding and funeral in Revelation.

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”  
(Revelation 21:2-4, NIV).

We see from Scripture that A Wedding is coming. We also see that there is a New World Order where we will no longer perform funerals.

There may come a time when you are asked to share at a wedding or funeral. Will you be able to toast the couple or comfort the bereaved? Will you be able to connect the events to ultimate things, and our transcendent Heavenly Father?

In a movie or book you may find a scene where a friend has been killed and others have put the body in the ground. There is no pastor or priest but someone awkwardly, with hat in hand, says a few words of remembrance and a word of committal. May you have the words in season for celebration and consolation.





## **ETERNITY: BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION**

You have circuit breakers on your power panel. They are safety measures. Without them, overloaded or crossed wires might glow like your stove element and start a fire. So, bless your electrician.

There are things in life that throw my personal circuit breakers, because they are just too big to tolerate, enjoy or understand. "Eternity" always flips my breaker. It is too big to comprehend! I can grasp 50 years. I can imagine 100 years but then my breaker starts tripping.



Recently I was telling Pam, "Imagine if we had this property for 1000 years." By the grace of God, we could turn our few acres into something truly fruitful and lovely. I've read of Methuselah living pretty close to 1,000 years. He topped off at 969.

The notion of endless, everlasting, eternal, limitless, continual, progressive, constant, boundless, infinite, interminable, ceaseless, uninterrupted, perpetual, undying, inexhaustible, incessant, boundless life fries my wires unless the breaker in my imagination goes off.

No wonder we have expressions in Scripture like "immeasurably more," "mystery" and "no mind has imagined."

How long can you ponder eternity before your circuit breaker snaps? Go ahead and try. But be careful, you may start a fire!

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24, NIV).





## MAKING OUR APPEARANCE

Here is a show-stopping quote from Joseph Addison (1672-1719). He was an English politician and writer. You might read this in granny gear. You'll see why.

“When I look upon the tombs of the great, every emotion of envy dies in me; when I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate desire goes out; when I meet with the grief of parents upon a tombstone, my heart melts with compassion; when I see the tombs of the parents themselves, I consider the vanity

of grieving for those we must quickly follow; when I see kings lying by those who deposed them, when I consider rival wits placed side by side, or the men that divided the world with their contests and disputes, I reflect with sorrow and astonishment on the little competitions, factions, and debates of mankind.

When I read the several dates of the tombs, of some that died yesterday, and some six hundred years ago,

I consider that great Day when we shall all of us be contemporaries, and make our appearance together."

You need strong mandibles to chew on Addison's words! How profound the notion that you and I, and everyone that has ever lived, will at a future date, be contemporaries and "make our appearance together before The Throne!"

An angelic messenger gave Daniel the word on the resurrection 500 years before Christ's advent: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2, NIV).

Daniel himself was given these comforting words in his old age: "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance" (Daniel 12:13).

If I don't see you before, I'll see you on the Great Day as we make our appearance together.





## GARAGE SALE

Do you love or hate them? Our unique value systems determine our responses to yard, estate, rummage or antique sales. Some, because of their values about sanitation, social mixing, guaranteed merchandise, etc. don't break for garage sales. They accelerate past them to see a predictable product from a predictable merchant.

Others eagerly hope to find great deals. Perhaps a new couple with modest income is looking to outfit their home economically. Sometimes a monied investor is looking for a rare find and a gullible seller.

A garage sale may mean lightening the ballast in our ship. Others come to outfit theirs. One gets extra pocket change, the other gets a deal.

Jesus told a story of a pearl merchant looking for fine pearls. I wonder if he made his big find at a garage sale? Wherever you go, may you be sure of your values and find true valuables for your treasury.



## WORTH THE PAIN

We heard the amazing story of a woman from North Korea who was in prison 20 years for her faith. She only had light clothing in the winter while the guards were bundled up. She would pray fervently, have third-heaven experiences, and stay warm.

She was taken to the firing squad and asked if she had one last request. She asked to sing, and sang, "Amazing Grace." While blindfolded she heard the executioner choke up, unable to say, "Fire!"

She was marched back into detention. On a second occasion, the same firing squad scenario repeated itself.

While she was in prison, and having heavenly experiences, she heard voices praying for North Koreans, and she recognized the voices as English. She knew as she listened to the voices that she would go to America.

She was released and ended up in China, working for the government. Her job was to arrange for speakers to come and lecture at colleges and for government officials.

She met Lance Wallnau in America while representing the Chinese government. They wanted a Christian intellectual to speak to government leadership! The Chinese know that Christians will become 30% of the population by 2030. They can handle the positive values of Christianity but don't want anti-government activities. It is a miracle that they were willing to listen to perspectives from Christians from the West!

The woman from North Korea, after all her birth pangs, is bearing fruit, greater openness to the Lord Jesus in a nation that has been closed! I think she believes that fruit is worth the pain.

“Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).





## PURCHASING POWER

Some believers talk up the cross and scarcely mention the resurrection. Others will share the resurrection and give little time to the cross. The events are two sides of a coin, and that coin has tremendous purchasing power!

When I see people wearing a cross, there are two thoughts: First, We should never forget the extraordinary expenditures of our Lord! Second, I wish there was a necklace picturing Jesus saying, "Do you guys have anything here to eat?"

The internet has us click on “icons.” The church has used the cross, fish, bread, dove and butterfly. One biblical image we might “click on” is the Lamb in Revelation 5:6.

“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”

If we were transported with John, and had the courage, we might have asked the Lamb, “Excuse me, but I have an odd feeling that at some time you died. But how could that be?”

Paul cites the benefits of both the passion and glorification in Romans 4:25: “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

It seems if we want people convinced and saved, we should preach the cross. If we want people changed and empowered, then we should preach the limitless ramifications of the resurrection.

He once hung on a cross, but He is returning on a white horse!

That's purchasing power!



## FISHING FOR REPENTANCE

It's my favorite repentance account in the Bible. It was surely Peter's favorite fish story!

Peter fished all night at the North end of the Sea of Galilee. He stayed close to the shore where the fish were attracted to the hot springs pouring into the lake. He raised lamps, which would attract the fish to the boat.

Peter was a successful professional and used proven fishing techniques. The result of burning the midnight oil? Not one fish!

In the morning he pulled to shore to rinse and straighten his nets. The prophet Jesus came by, and a crowd started pressing. So, Jesus commandeered Peter's vessel and preached to the people from the boat. Then, rather than go back to shore where Peter could get a long-awaited nap, Jesus said, "Put out into deep water for a catch."

Perhaps to humor Jesus or to acknowledge him as a notoriety, or perhaps... At any rate, Peter says, "OK, because you say so." The nets go down, but don't come up easily! They have a catch! As the fish are pulled in, the boat sits lower and lower till water starts trickling over the gunnels!



I wish it was on video. Peter kneels down before Jesus on piles of fish and says, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" To the best of our knowledge, Jesus had not mentioned anything about Peter's sin. He had not scolded him, saying, "Peter, you are a crummy, depraved reprobate deserving the fires of Hell." There was no "Just as I am" playing in the background.

What made Peter repent? It was the pile of fish! A landslide of prosperity brought repentance! I have heard people pray that non-believers experience hardships to turn them to God. For a few, hardship might be a stimulant, but if you want real repentance, it will come from encountering our Father's abundant loving-kindness.

Interestingly, by the kindness of God, in a repeat performance, in John 21, Peter got another great catch. It sealed a great comeback!

“Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (Romans 4:4)

Paul said that God’s kindness leads us to repentance. Rather than pray your enemies and non-Christian friends get a dose of hardship to lead them to Christ, pray for the goodness of God to bowl them over! Jesus said, “Bless your enemies, don’t curse them!” When we experience God’s cascading blessings, it may lead us into a trembling sensation of awe and wonder which causes us to turn to our gracious Benefactor. Consider the prophecy of Jeremiah in 33:9 – “...they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide....”

May our friends who are distant from Yeshua be hit hard by His overflowing kindness, bringing them to true repentance!



# RADIATING AUTHORITY

It was around 1990, and the government was talking about expanding the Yakima, Washington, Firing Range. I lived next door and was not sure this was in the best interest of either our military or our community and wrote a letter to the editor expressing my cautions. The military leadership at Fort Lewis, Washington, read my editorial and invited me to come and talk.

I brought a few other local pastors with me. We were greeted hospitably at Fort Lewis. We met a man that still leaves a strong impression on me as I think of him, Commandant Lieutenant General Calvin A. H. Waller. I have never met a man that exuded such confidence. The man radiated with authority! He cordially listened to our concerns and shared with us his perspectives on the value of expanding the Yakima Firing Range. We shared lunch with hundreds of soldiers in the mess while General Waller mixed with the soldiers.

I was struck by a comment General Waller made, saying in essence, "I believe that expanding the Firing Center is in the military's best interest. I will ask for the expansion of the center. But I am a soldier. If I am refused, I will salute and say, 'Yes sir.'"

General Waller was a man loaded with authority. Thousands of men, tons of machinery, and probably a few tactical

nukes were at his command, yet he knew the limits of his authority and that his authority came from above him.

There is a pressing need for leadership with competence and character today. We need it from the top down in government. It is imperative in business, education and media. It is most critical in the Church of Jesus.

My encouragement to you today is to respond to God's authority and exercise the leadership role the Lord has assigned you!

**“For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.**

**I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes;  
and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes.**

**I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it”  
(Luke 7:8).**



8 The one who does not love does not know God, for <sup>a</sup>God is love.

9 By this the love of God was manifested <sup>1a</sup>in us, that <sup>b</sup>God has sent His <sup>2</sup>only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

- 10 In this is love, <sup>a</sup>not that we <sup>1</sup>loved God, but that <sup>b</sup>He loved us and sent His Son *to be* <sup>c</sup>the propitiation for our sins.

11 <sup>a</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, <sup>b</sup>we also ought to love one another.

12 <sup>a</sup>No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His <sup>b</sup>love is perfected in us.

## THE OTHER LOVE CHAPTER

Did you know that 1 John has more about love, pound for pound, than any book in the Bible?

Our favorite chapter on love is 1 Corinthians 13. Its poetry and truth sweep us up to the third heaven! It may interest you to know that the word "love" appears in that chapter 9 times.

In 1 John 4 "love" appears 25 times! 1 Corinthians has the elegance of love, but John has the get-er-done of love.

John uses more “love one another’s” than any other Bible contributor. “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

There is a church tradition which says that when John was an old man in Ephesus, he had to be carried to the church by the arms of his disciples. At these meetings, he was accustomed to say no more than “Little children, love one another!”

After a time, the leaders wearied at always hearing the same words. They asked, “Master, why do you always say this?” “It is the Lord’s command,” was his reply. “And if this alone be done, it is enough!”

Perhaps you’d like to read the other love chapter – 1 John 4.





## ONE ANOTHERING

Do you practice the “gathered together” passages?

The sheep are gathered in the flock.

The bricks are gathered into a building.

The children are gathered in the family.

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The soldiers are gathered into an army.

A seductive philosophy of individualism has pillaged us. We separate ourselves,

saying to other Lovers of Christ, people with powerful gifts, callings and perspectives, "I don't need you!"  
(1 Corinthians 12:21)

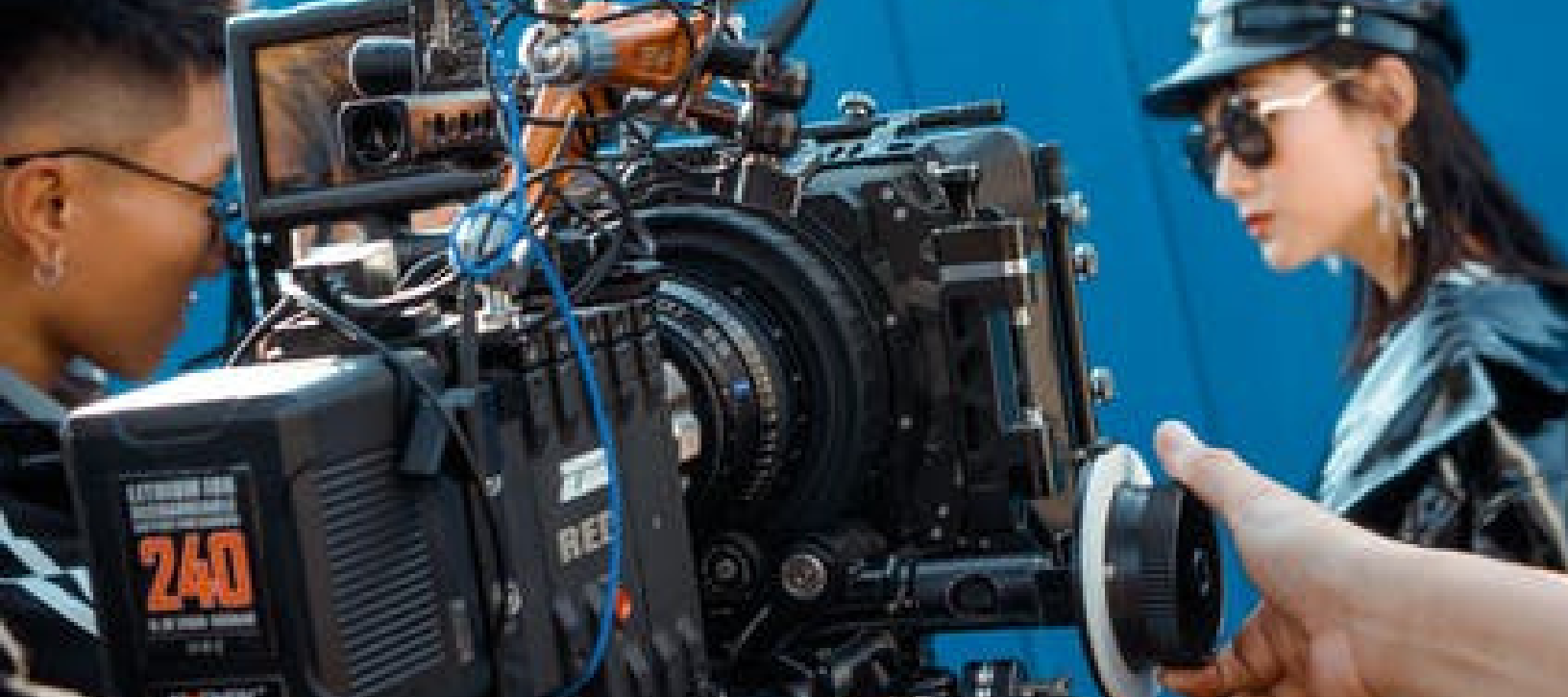
Be encouraged by some of the dozens of "ONE ANOTHER" passages! Fortify yourself and be cemented into relationship with other believers:

- Romans 12:10 – Honor one another above yourselves.
- Romans 12:16 – Live in harmony with one another.
- Galatians 5:13 – Serve one another in love.
- Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- Ephesians 5:21 – Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- .
- Colossians 3:16 – Admonish one another with all wisdom
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Encourage one another and build each other up
- 1 Peter 3:8 – Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

There is only one way to obey the “one another” commands, that is by being in relationship with other saints. Don’t be a separatist. Practice “one-anothering”





## THE MAKING OF THE MOVIE

I am often more moved by the making of the movie than by the movie itself. I find an ache and longing, sometimes with tears, when I see a collective effort bring forth excellence in creativity for a greater impact.

After watching clips from Saving Private Ryan, I began viewing the making of this film which won five Academy Awards. What and who went into the movie?

WW II soldiers were interviewed for the production. Interviews were also done with

with actors, scriptwriters, costuming, props, sound, lighting, and camera people.

Irish soldiers composed the film's troops.

Old landing craft were found and refurbished for the movie.

A town was built, then carefully blown up to create staging.

It was fascinating to hear Spielberg's production genius.

And I absolutely love the music by John Williams!

I am compelled by creativity, excellence, and collaboration for a greater cause. I am moved when I discover the intense teamwork which brings forth a great production. Amazing things can be achieved when people bring their gifts and passions and pull together!

How I long for the Church of Jesus Christ  
to be known for creative excellence and  
collaborative “productions” which will  
gain the gaze of the world!

For this I pray!



S



## MUSICAL SNOB?

I found myself in a huge green field with luscious trees around the edges. There was an invisible orchestra playing the most beautiful music! I knew in my spirit this was the music of the Kingdom Come! It was not the music of the Kingdom that was yet to come, it was the music of the Kingdom that had in fact, come. Later in the dream, I was telling another person of this most beautiful music of the Kingdom Come.

When I became a believer in 1972, I was hungry to know more of God. I would tune in to Christian radio and listen to Bible teachers talk about the Lord Jesus. One of the most painful aspects of being a new believer at that time was listening to "antique" Christian music. I thought the music was corny and archaic. I was put off by dull tunes and saccharine lyrics.

I pressed through the unsavory music because I did not want to miss hearing something about the Jesus I was coming to love. I even found myself listening to the painful hymns and gospel songs, because sometimes I would find Jesus in them. I tried to coach myself to stick in there, remembering that at one point those songs were new-born and some people even encountered God through them!

At this end of my life, I have different pains in Christian music. It is the pain of listening to overly repetitive choruses with shallow lyrics.



Still, I listen hard and press in realizing that I don't have to like the music I sing to God; I just have to love Him. I remind myself that others are actually encountering God with music I find taxing to listen to.

I have learned how to take music that does not stimulate my palate, with words I consider dull or superficial, and use them to worship my Lord. I have overcome! I do not focus on the tune or lyrics so much as on the Savior I love!

I believe the Church is beginning to discover the most amazing music, the music of the Kingdom Come!





## FLESH EATERS

As young children we were told stories of cannibals who ate the flesh of their enemies to show their domination and attempt to assume their enemies' powers. We saw pictures of these scary-looking flesh-eaters in National Geographic and social science books, and were rightly appalled.

Eating human flesh. Can society decay lower than that? Of all the human atrocities, what could be more vulgar?

The early believers in the Roman world were vilified as cannibals. The outsiders learned that Christians had a ceremony where they ate the flesh and drank the blood of Jesus. Those saints had slanderous propaganda to contend with. Just like the news spinners of today the Church's enemies would take "sound bites" distorting the truth.

They would say, "The leader of this appalling religion has said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you'" (John 6:53). Of course, the uninformed society did not know the rest of Jesus' teaching: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

To consume Jesus is to consume His Spirit, His manners, His values and practices. There is a saying, "You are what you eat."

When we ingest the Lord, His Spirit dwells inside of us, and we assume the power and love of our Great Friend!

“For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink” (John 6:55).

May the Saints of God become the caterers of Real Food to the nations of the earth!





## BETTER THAN COOL

I was blithely walking through my college commons when I noticed something. The people I was walking by were cool. It showed in the way they cocked their hips and held their chins. It was the way they posed with their cigarettes and how they slung their arm around their girlfriends.

At the same instant, I realized that I was not, and was unlikely to become, cool. I was not the academic or athletic superstar, not artsy or stylish, or a socialite. I was not cool, just an average guy.



I was surprised, utterly blindsided, by an emotional response. It was a sensation of ecstasy and euphoria. I burst into singing as I walked through the campus: "I'm not cool, I'm not cool! Thank you, God, I'm not cool!" I felt light and carefree! I was walking on air, full of exhilaration and joy to the point of being giddy!

I wasn't planning on having an emotional experience that day. It just dropped on me. It still lingers. It's a feeling of gratitude, of belonging, of security and identity.

Think of the strangling, crushing weight many cool people must bear; then think of the glorious implications of not being cool:·

We don't need to primp, pose, pretend, or play-act to be accepted.

There is no image that needs to be fed or maintained.

We can relax and be ourselves!

Many do not score high on the Cool Index,  
but they are perfectly delightful,  
precious individuals. In fact, each is an  
original creation in God's treasure box.  
And that's better than cool!





# CREATIVITY

The child with his finger paints, and the artist with her pastels must have it. It's essential to poet, musician and architect. It comes in handy for the home accountant and car mechanic. **It's called creativity!**

Our Creator made us in his image. Like our Creator, we are equipped and disposed to create! Creativity dreams up cures for disease, and ways to twist that couch through the narrow doorway. Creativity gets a ship in a bottle and a man on the moon.



What is it that God has given you by way of creativity? What inventive quality lies dormant or only partially exercised in you? Do you have in you a novel, a song or a new way to tell your family you love them? Perhaps you have the fix for socks that lose their elastic cling or a new glue to fix broken relationships.

John Maxwell tells this story about one of my creative heroes:

“A school teacher gave students an art assignment. She waited as each child took out crayons and colored pencils and went to work. After a while, she started down the aisle, looking over the children’s crude drawings. She came to one boy’s desk, picked up his paper, looked and said, ‘Walter, flowers don’t have faces.’

Little Walt Disney looked up at her and said with authority, ‘Mine do!’”

Walt Disney had a dream. He saw things others did not see—and put them on paper. Over the years that dream materialized into a mouse who talked, an elephant who flew, a cricket who danced, and flowers—thousands of flowers—all with faces.”

Often when I hear an inspiring secular song or watch a stirring secular movie, I wonder why creativity is often short in the Church. I know the Creator would release so much more to His Children, if we would inquire of Him. You’re loaded with gifts of creativity for art, gardening, woodworking, baking, decorating and whatnot! Pump from the well of your God-given creativity today!



## FIGS AND GRAPES

Our figs and grapes are ripening together. Delicious!!! They are signs and symbols of blessing. Solomon's reign was Israel's golden age. From North to South everyone was living in peace and prosperity.

"During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25).

The sweetness of the fig and grape are used to illustrate romance in Song of Songs 2:13 – "The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."



When the days were dark, Micah prophesied a future of happiness and security by saying, "Every man will sit under his own vine, and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken" (Micah 4:4).

God is so much bigger than fruit trees! In one of the most powerful demonstrations of faith in Scripture, Habakkuk professes to worship the LORD, even with total crop failure. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Zechariah's blessing for the Messianic Future hails the ultimate golden age: "'In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty" (Zechariah 3:10).

The Lord Jesus used the fig tree as a sign that the kingdom was near. You might be interested to know that the fig does not produce any visible flower. It goes straight into fruit production. Don't look for "normal" as the Kingdom emerges.

You may or may not have vines and fig trees in your yard, but may this be your season of Messianic security and peace as you bear fruit by the Holy Spirit, fruit that remains!



## MAKING APPLICATIONS: A VISION

Pam and I were in bed. She had beaten me to the pillow. I was reclining reading a book with a light beside me. I put the book down and looked across the room to the door and ceiling. Then I had a vision.

I saw an old clay bowl full of blood. Then a leafy branch was dipped into it. The bloody branch painted the door jams and lentil with the blood.

As I was seeing this vision, I assumed Pam had fallen asleep. Then she began to pray, "Lord, may You take the blood and put it upon our doorpost." Pretty remarkable! Somehow both of our spirits were sensing the same thing!

We have applications for our computers.  
We apply ointment to aching muscles.

We apply math formulas to decide how much material to buy.

The word of God holds potential, but when applied, things happen!

God told Israel to put the blood on the doorposts. Keeping it in a bowl was not enough. The angel of death would need to see the blood applied on the posts in order to pass by.

It is good to consider daily the Passion and Victory of our Lord. May His Spirit show us what applications to make today of His precious blood, to be safe and secure in Yeshua.



## IN THE POOL WITH CAIN

I had three pairs of goggles, put one on, and left the other two at the end of my lane. After swimming about 15 minutes, I saw a boy sitting beside my goggles. He looked at me and innocently asked if he could borrow a pair. It was interesting that he asked so straightforwardly. I said, "OK," adjusted the goggles for him and resumed swimming. The boy swam with full-length blue Jeans diving for a toy.

I stopped and talked to him while he struggled to tread water. His name was Cain; he was eight and lived in a group home. A handful of other boys from the home were also there. He asked if I would play with him. What innocence and frankness! We dove together for a few minutes.

As Cain was trying on the other set of goggles, he said, "Someday I hope I will have a foster family." I was touched and felt an impression: The curse is coming off Cain.

After finishing laps, we visited in the water. Both of us linked an elbow on the side of the pool. I asked, "Cain, do you know anything about Jesus?" He gave a childlike account of Jesus' death and resurrection. I told him that it was a powerful story, and that it was true!

Feeling I might never see Cain again, I encouraged him to get to know Jesus better



and better by talking to him daily: "Jesus is real and He deeply cares for you, Cain. He will help you through life."

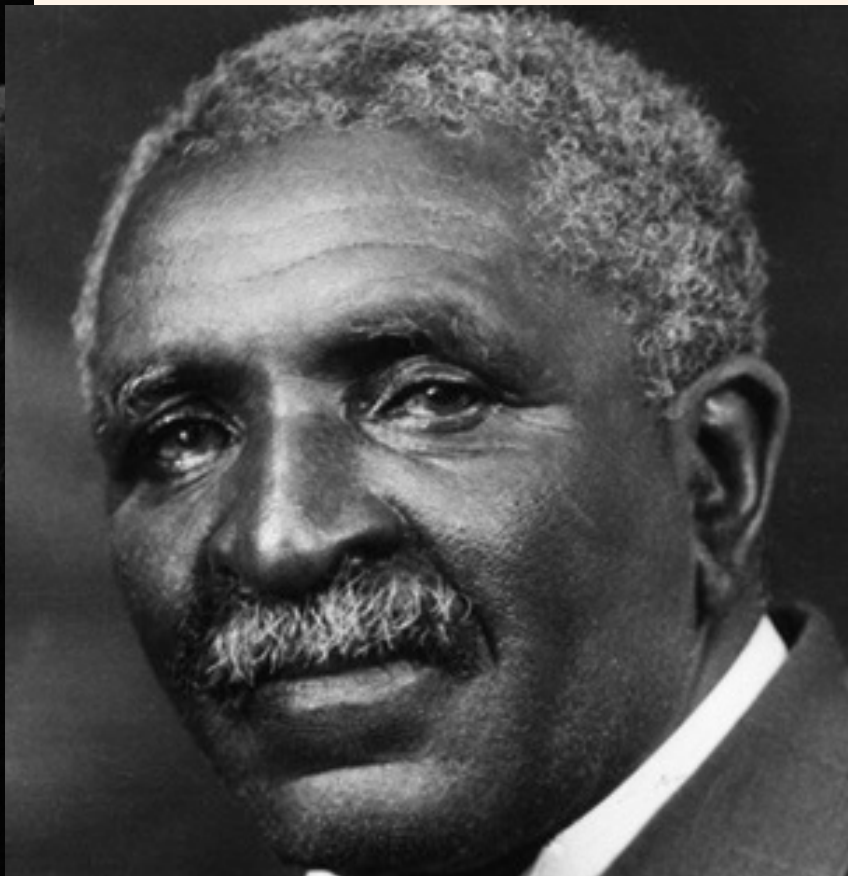
I was growing attached to this boy and felt like packing him home and fathering him. He said, "I sure wish I had a pair of goggles like these." I told him, "Keep them. I give them to you."

He confided that he had had some discipline problems at the home, but he had a special class apart from the others and that he thought he was doing better. He mentioned also that there was a tiny child in his group that chattered and babbled and sounded funny. I told him that he was probably a good friend to that child.

I prayed a short but earnest prayer with that eight-year-old boy. As I was getting out of the pool, he asked, "Do you know the song 'I See the Moon'?"

He sang: "I see the moon and the moon sees me... God bless the moon and God bless me." As I walked away, Cain continued to sing the song to himself. I was touched with emotion for Cain's challenges, his innocence, uncertainty and hope. May the living God follow that young man's career!





## THE BIRTH OF FAMOUS PEOPLE

A tour bus was traveling through the ancient castles and cities of Europe. As the bus entered a city, a man asked the guide, "Were any famous men born in this city?" The guide answered, "No, only babies."

Distinction may not come with the birthday suit. It does not come from geography. Achievement often blooms on the wrong side of the tracks and with those lacking proper genes.



Consider Nathaniel's diminishment of Jesus' hometown: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Greatness can emerge from unexpected places.

Who expects greatness to come from someone deaf and blind? Who expects greatness to come out of a life born in slavery?

Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

That means, my believing friend, that as a true follower of Jesus, you are greater than Hall of Fame slugger John the Baptist! There is kingdom greatness for you because our Father wills it.

Child of God, you are famous in heaven!  
As heaven works its way to earth, this  
will become more obvious. Don't let your  
birthday suit confine you!

**"The best and most beautiful things in the world  
cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt  
with the heart."**

*Helen Keller*

**"When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the  
mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That  
knowledge is for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the  
mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well George,  
that's more nearly your size.'"**

*George Washington Carver*





## THE PERILS OF COMPARISON

“When they measure themselves by themselves  
and compare themselves with themselves,  
they are not wise”

(2 Corinthians 10:12)

One of two things tends to happen when we compare ourselves with others: Either we judge others out of our strengths and see them as inferior, or we judge others out of our weakness and depreciate ourselves.

Perhaps the Lord warned us about judging because of our disposition to compare. Perhaps we are not as competent to evaluate others as we think. Perhaps we are a tad underqualified to sit in God's seat of judgment.

Certainly, we must make moral judgments to navigate life in society, but we should tremble, just a bit, when we play the comparison game.







## OFF TO SCHOOL

I've heard people say, "I don't believe in organized religion."

I answer, "Do you prefer disorganized religion?"

Often at the root of such statements is a history of hurt, or an avoidance of the challenges of relationship. Fish swim in schools for a reason.

Christians swim in congregations. Some claim an affinity toward Jesus yet do not mix with other believers.

When we say, “I’m a Christian but keep to myself,” we are actually saying, “I like Jesus; I just don’t share his values for people.”

We may avoid fellowship even if we attend a church. We go “low profile.” We may keep distance out of fear, arrogance, a sense of unworthiness, hopelessness or avoidance of deep issues.

Hundreds of verses exhort, model or imply the relational imperative. Still many believe in the “safe, undemanding” life of isolation, where we are not responsible for others, or responsible to them. We opt for predictable loneliness rather than connections which are sometimes messy.



Hebrews 10:25 urges, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” We want to be found united in the body of Christ when “The Day” comes!

Salvation comes through Christ alone. None other than Jesus calls us to “one another” with fellow believers. Who are we to refuse? Don’t play hooky. See you in school!







## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

A good author will make his characters three-dimensional, thoughtful, emotional and active. She or he will give them virtues, vices and mannerisms.

The author will give them predictable patterns and yet not paint the character so completely that there is no room for surprises. The character may act "out of character." Characters interest us in their predictable patterns but hook us when they act "uncharacteristically."

The author may present an unlikely hero. The shy, bumbler saves the day almost by accident! The hardened criminal is softened by the plight of an innocent child, and somehow both the criminal and child are rescued! The timid wallflower gets her moxie when she's had enough of the villain. Flattened bad guy!

God writes stories with unlikely champions. Gideon cowering in the winepress is galvanized to lead his clans against the teeming minions! Jael, your everyday Bedouin wife, drives a tent stake through the scoundrel's sleeping head. I can picture the boys coming home and saying, "Wow, Mom! You are amazing!"

The Great Author had the role for the Lead written before the foundations of the earth. Jesus rides the white horse at the head of the army! But following Him are many supporting actors. By His amazing grace, we are among them! Amazing indeed, to think that God had a script in mind for each of us!

In every story the character at the end is not the same person we met at the beginning. When God's grand magnum opus is completed, I wonder what you and I will look like!

Your role in the story is critical. May you play it with all your heart! See you at the curtain call!

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.  
But we know that when He appears,  
we shall be like Him,  
for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2-3).





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