



It's Just A Thought

Debbie Ousley

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By Debbie Ousley

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Debbie Ousley passed away on June 30th, 2016, after a year-long battle with cancer.
This book is left as a part of her legacy.

Introduction

Hi! If you are reading this introduction then somehow this book has fallen into your hands. You may be asking yourself, “who is this woman?” or you may be thinking “just what we need – another want-to-be author.” Well, my name is on the cover but that really doesn’t tell you much, does it?

I’d venture to say I’m probably a lot like you and if you continue to read you might say “hey, I could do this” and you know what? You are right! That’s the beautiful part about Christ; He will allow all of us to accomplish that “thing” that He births in our hearts. It’s just left up to us to take the chance and follow it through.

I’m more convinced now than ever before in my Christian walk, that it doesn’t matter too much who a person is, as how much assurance we have in knowing Who we belong to.

“It’s Just A Thought” is a collection of true stories and thoughts that will enable you to know who I am, but more importantly, as you read these thoughts, that Christ, the One we all can belong to, will be better known to you.

A few months ago, my siblings and I received a small inheritance check from the estate of a great-uncle. The total of our checks would have gone to my father had he been living, and to give you an idea of the amount of the checks, someone told me that there were one hundred descendants. Our receiving this check had very little to do with who we were. I might as well have been the check-out lady down at the local department store. You see, my name and address was just one of the ninety-nine others. Are you getting it?

The only thing that entitled us to those checks was that we belonged to our father who belonged to his father who was a brother to the gentleman who passed away. Our entitlement to God’s great riches only comes to us because we become a part of His family. Therefore, it is not so important who we are as Who we belong to.

When we can really “get” this truth in our hearts it will empower us with “peace that passeth” all mankind’s understanding. It gives us a confidence that circumstances or this world can’t shake. It’s no longer me, one person who’s in this thing, but a whole big family with our great, big wonderful Father-God! Hey, that’s Good News! You and I have seen how Christ will take the most unlikely character and turn them into someone great for Him (I think He really likes doing that, don’t you?).

As man looks at an individual and measures them up by their name, their family history (and by the way, every family has someone’s reputation they’re trying to live up to or live down), their education, their personality, their looks and on and on. We will come up with a grand total . . . BUT GOD comes along and He sees us with a much different eye. He not only sees us now and who we are, but He also sees us for what we are going to become after we become HIS. THAT’S GOOD NEWS!

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Jesus “Turnip” In My Life

Picture it, if you will, 1966, the Vietnam War was the main topic of conversation. As families glued themselves to their black and white TV's every evening they strained to see or hear as the newscaster reported the most current stories. You see, everyone knew someone that was over there and later, two of my own brothers were drafted and sent to Vietnam also. We were so thankful that God protected them and brought them home to us.

The biggest part of my life at that time was spent in a small country school in Paris Crossing. At that time, we still had two grades in one room. This particular year I was in my fifth-grade class and we had a new teacher. She added something special to that little country school. She became my favorite teacher of all the thirteen years I attended school. She was “classy” and made learning exciting. She made you feel really special, you know what I mean? Every child should have the memory of one of those kinds of teachers in their life.

That day she was starting a new project for our class. We were going to tape a story on a tape recorder (something I had never seen). “Oh, be careful Deb, you're gonna show your ‘hickness’” – what can I say? As the narrator would read the story, the rest of the class would provide the sound effects.

As each student volunteered to be responsible for a different sound effect, it was getting down to almost none left. “Now,” she said, “we need the sound of horse's hooves.” I got caught up in the moment (as I still do) and raised my hand. “How hard could that be?” I thought. As she wrote my name beside the sound of horse's hooves she said, “Debbie, a hollowed-out coconut cut in half would make a great sound for horse's hooves.”

A coconut! I had not even seen a real coconut! The only time I'd ever experienced the taste of a coconut was in a candy bar! The only time I'd seen a coconut still in its natural form was on an old Tarzan movie, you know the scene - where Cheetah would climb the tree and pelt coconuts down at Tarzan and Jane?

Hey, what had I gotten myself into? (and I still ask myself that question many times, thirty-four years later). You need to understand, we lived way back in the country and once you stepped off the bus when returning home in the evening you normally did not go anywhere until school the next day. The closest store was a little family-run store in Paris and I'm almost sure I had never seen any coconuts lying around.

At that point it would have been easier to bring a real horse to school the next day ('cause I knew our neighbor, Mr. Tiller, had a horse and I believe he would have loaned it out). A coconut!

It's true, I could have 'fessed-up to Mrs. _____, I know she would have understood. But I admired this lady and, hey, the whole class was depending on me! So, I just stewed about the situation the rest of the day. I didn't talk to Mom when I got home or share my problem with any of my older sisters or brothers for fear of being made fun of. I didn't want to take the chance of them calling me a coconut-head. You see, I didn't have much sense but I still had my pride (a lot of good that was doing me!).

Man, I had to think! So, I went to one of my favorite places to do that, in our storm cellar. But I did more than think. I had heard about Jesus and had been told how He was interested in everything about my life, but, man, He had to be awfully busy with the war and all.

I did pray that day, just a simple prayer, “Lord, help me.” I don’t know what I expected Him to do. I didn’t really think I’d walk out of that cellar and a big old coconut would fall off our walnut tree, but at that point I needed a miracle.

As I pondered the problem sitting in that dark, damp cellar my eyes fell on the biggest, ugliest pile of turnips lying in the corner you ever saw. But friends, they looked like coconuts to me . . .

Right at that moment, Jesus had “turned-up” for me. He had, for the first time in my life, showed Himself as being real. I picked up about three of those “babies,” swiped Mom’s paring knife, and got busy. After about the second turnip, IT WORKED!

I put them in a sack and kinda “snuck” them in my desk the next day. When it came time for my horses to gallop off into the sunset, I pulled them out and did my thing!

Any apprehension I had about the reaction Mrs. _____ would have about my coconut-turnip-hooves, was soon put to rest when she made such a big deal about them. It made all my classmates want to try them out. “Thanks Mrs. _____” and those turnip hooves stayed in my desk until they started drying up.

That was the first of many, many times the Lord has “turned-up” for me. That simple prayer answered in a simple way proved His love toward me. From that time on, He has “turned-up” for me in various ways. Sometimes it was after I’d gotten myself into trouble, just to teach me the lesson I needed to learn. Sometimes He wasn’t so welcomed when I was away from Him and really just wanted Him to leave me alone. But He wouldn’t. He’d “turn-up” in a song or something would remind me of how much He loved me.

I'm so glad He didn't leave me alone. I'm glad He honored that person's prayer that had mentioned my name to Him. We should count it a privilege when Christ just keeps "turnin-up" in our lives.

I encourage you right now to think back in your life to the first time that Christ "turned-up" for you. Hold that memory close to you and draw on that truth. Don't allow time, hurts, disappointments or misplaced goals for this life to diminish that event that was, at the time, more real than life, and still is.

Just a Thought . . .

Why can't we be happy for other's good fortune? What about those feelings that rises up in us when we see a neighbor get a new car, or hear about someone's promotion? You know what I mean! You are smiling on the outside, hoping it doesn't show on your face like a neon sign flashing, "jealousy lives here!" I know it's a hard pill to swallow, and by the way, that's another sure give away, all that swallowing we do, "Man, that's great news!" thinking all the time, "but it would be better news if it was me and not you."

We really do want to be happy for them, and we don't want to feel this way. We'll start getting rough with ourselves, "Self, you know this is not acceptable. Shake this off and be happy for them, self." We turn ourselves every which way but loose, trying to get our thoughts and feelings back into that Christ-Like nature.

Don't you believe when one is really thankful with what they have it lessens the chance of becoming jealous? Not thinking way too much of one's self and expecting others to treat us special couldn't hurt either. True love for others will also enable us to "fend" off that sneaky, joy-stealing rascal. That kind of love has to be a supernatural love, don't you think? Because it's always been mankind's nature to want what someone else has.

In Isaiah 14:12-15, we see Lucifer wanting what God had, but he has fallen and he won't ever get up. Then we see in Genesis 3:15 how Satan came to Eve tricking her into also losing her place with God because he couldn't have it. "If I can't have it, then I don't want you to have it either!"

But, you know, having the awareness of knowing that these feelings are not like the Lord is progress. Each time we check ourselves and beat down the feeling of jealousy, and replace it with

genuine joy for other's accomplishments, will build up our resistance against that cold, cruel, ugly, green-eyed monster. "I wish I had come up with that title for jealousy!"

A Four Letter Word That Is Always Welcome

“What makes that little ole’ ant, think it can move a rubber tree plant? It has high hopes . . . it’s got high hopes.” Thank God for hope. A four-letter word that can be used everywhere, anytime. Hope for a better day; hope for success or a miracle. That little ant probably can’t move a rubber tree plant, but I’m not going to tell it. As long as we have hope we have a force in our lives no man can stop. Hope can move us to do things no man thought possible. It empowers us with strength to beat down those negative opinions we face every day. Hope has changed our world and our lives and, as long as it lives, it will continue to. Hope that sliver of light that keeps us moving toward our goal. It’s A-L-I-V-E! If you think not, just see how it makes you feel when you hear the word “hopeless.” Hopeless – No chance; death to a dream; the finish to a situation; no answer.

Hope makes us rise up, if not physically, at least inside. Where our hope lies depends on us. My hope is in the person He is making me to be (I haven’t arrived yet); hope in my fellow man. We’ve all got rubber trees in our lives. I’m hoping some wise guy don’t come along and tell us we can’t move them ...

A FRIEND IS FOREVER

The news story reads “A young man pleads guilty of beating (and get this part) his “friends” to death.” Now folks, I’m not the sharpest knife in the old silverware drawer, but something tells me this guy was not these boy’s friend. A friend will give you a pat on the back, they won’t take a club to it. A friend will tell you if you have stuff stuck in your teeth, not try to knock them out.

A friend, according to Webster is “A person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard.” My concern for the American people is that, as our priorities change for more material things, the making of friends are being lost. The drive for bigger and better is taking more of our time and energy, therefore we have less time and energy to work on our “people skills.”

I’d say most people, if asked, would regard their fellow workers as their friends over those they worship with, and why not, when they spend eight to twelve hours a day with them every day as compared to three or four hours a week at Church? There are different degrees of friendship. There’s a “passing” friend, one you speak to, but doesn’t know where you live. Then there’s a “buddy” friend, one you have common interests with. Someone you laugh and shoot the breeze with.

They know where you live but haven’t been over for a meal.

There’s a “close” friend, someone who has the same interests. You laugh with them, and cry together. You’ve shared meals together and they know where you store the extra toilet tissue. You can confide in them without fear of them telling all they know, and some of what they don’t. They have seen you at your best and worst, and still consider you their friend.

And there’s a “Savior” friend. He’s all the above. He listens to you and really does like to hear you talk to Him. He knows your

fears and dreams. He wants the best for you. When He tells you negative things about yourself it's because He loves you. He'll send a "loving" friend when you need a hug or word of encouragement. He'll send His peace when things go crazy.

My Mom would say, "Debbie, if you want a friend, you gotta be a friend." Well, this "Savior" friend is our friend and it's left up to us how close a friend we make Him. And, contrary to some beliefs, He doesn't beat us up!

Accommodating

Have you noticed how accommodating people are when they are getting your money? When you're buying a new car, the salesperson is all over you, "Yes, we can do that." THEN after you drive that beauty off the lot, try setting a convenient time to get that knocking sound checked.

Lately I've noticed it's people in the restaurants and stores who aren't very accommodating. Do we really have to pay for snippy remarks and rolling eyes? We're already dipping into our life's savings for three bags of groceries. Remember when you'd go into a store and the employees treated you with respect? If they were thinking nasty thoughts about you, they were professional enough to hide it.

I think sometimes it's my age because it sure seems those young pretty girls get a lot of attention. But they are only buying Clearasil! I'm here to buy the week's grocery supply.

What's wrong with this picture? Those who can say "YES" find it just as easy to say "NO" or will connect you with someone who is even less accommodating, to assist you in your plight. You feel like giving them a little attitude adjustment, but that's not very "Christianity." Besides, they hold the "key" to your problem. Well, give it up!

The answer to this accommodation problem is an old one; something the American people have forgotten from our Sunday School days: THE GOLDEN RULE: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Many times, we want MERCY for our OWN SELVES and PUNISHMENT for OTHERS but one thing's for sure: One day,

sooner or later, we will be “THE OTHERS.” (remember how it feels).

“August 17th”

As a child I didn't understand why Mom always got in a better mood around the middle of August, and Dad in a foul mood. But now, as an adult, I can see why. My Mom at one time, having as many as seven children in school, or maybe I should say out of school during the summer, she knew it was only days before we would be grabbing our books, brown bags, and behinds out to the bus.

Now Dad, on the other hand, knew he had seven book-packin', bus riding, lunch fixins' individuals he was needing to buy a few new clothes for, not to mention paper, pencils, and books. No wonder he was in a bad mood! A lot of fathers would file “chapter thirteen” if they had that facing them today.

It's sure no mystery who had the most to look forward to, and as Mom dreamed of bus exhaust, she knew peace and quiet would follow. And there was no question about it, she deserved it. For three months she had cooked three meals a day for a small army – I don't know how she did it! And wash day was really WASH DAY because it took all day long to carry water, wash, rinse, wring, and hang all on the line. Then there was the job of taking them all down, ironing, folding, and putting them away (just writing it on the paper makes me tired). While it's true she had more help in the summer, I know she would have traded it for time alone any day.

Maybe that's why if you stayed home from school, you had better have been sick! Daddy always came through with his part and, after a week or so into the school year, he got into a better mood; maybe because he saw how happy Mom was – I don't know . . . Some might say, “that was too many children,” or “you came from a dysfunctional home.” My reply to that would be any family without Christ is dysfunctional and

even then it can get a little crazy at times. Besides, being the youngest of twelve makes me real thankful it was twelve and not eleven. I know Jerry and my two kids are!

I would be the first to say that our childhood affects our adulthood a lot, but, ya know, if we'd quit thinking about what we didn't have as a child and start thinking about what we did have, we could maybe be happier about our childhood. And guess what? We'd feel better about ourselves now. I know God has a plan for all of us, and I have to believe and I hope you do too, that He is a big enough God to make that plan happen if we'll cooperate just a little.

So, as the new school year begins, I know things are different from when I went to school, but hey, is it really that much different? I'm almost sure I saw a mother buying paper and pencils three weeks ago down at Wal-Mart and she had a big smile on her face

...

“Family – You’ve Gotta Love ‘Em”

“Leftovers”

Thanksgiving has been over for at least a week or two,
 But we’re still eating turkey,
 Turkey salad, turkey stew,
 Turkey puffs, turkey pudding, turkey patties, turkey pies,
 Turkey bisque and turkey burgers,
 Turkey fritters, turkey fries!
 For lunch our mother made us turkey slices on a stick,
 There’ll be turkey tarts for supper,
 All this turkey makes me sick,
 For tomorrow she’s preparing turkey dumplings stuffed
 with peas,
 Oh, I never thought I’d say this –
 “Mother! No more turkey . . . please!”

Megan recited this poem when she was in the fifth grade and I still laugh every time I read it. I don’t know about you but the best part of the turkey is testing it when carving, and a big turkey sandwich with Miracle Whip later that night. Got milk?

Please, don’t get me wrong, I enjoy the big family dinners and it’s nice when you receive compliments like “This is the juiciest turkey I have ever eaten,” but really, even “family” would be reluctant to say, “This bird is as dry as sawdust!” And you can get a little suspicious when two or three volunteers to bake the turkey next year.

Ahhh . . . family . . . they can be your biggest blessing or a person’s biggest pain all in the same day. Who am I kidding? All in the same hour! We are required to love them and most of the

time do, but understanding them and living with them without a little strife, that would be something new!

You have families that are really close (wishing sometimes you didn't know everything that's going on in their marriage), then, there are families when asked if they have any siblings, would need a moment to think about it before they answered (former president Carter would be in that group).

You have some people that would like to trade in their family for a more ideal one. I wonder what that would be? More like them, I reckon! Duh . . . Let's admit it though, "Blood is thicker than water," and the most of us would give up a kidney for a family member. And even though we might not agree with everything our family members do (contrary to them being proud of all our actions) it would not be advisable to let us hear anyone bad-mouthing them. That's a "right" reserved just for us 'cause we know in our hearts we do love them.

It's not our intentions to "wound" and even our disapproval is seasoned with love. Cause when it comes right down to it, we do want the very best for them in life, not leftovers!

HAPPY HEALTHY NEW YEAR!

With the new year now here, there comes opportunities for new experiences for us all. But let us not forget how fast time passes by. It seems we were just getting ready to celebrate 1998.

“Time stands still for no man, woman, and child.” I added the woman and child because even my teen-aged son and eleven-year-old daughter are amazed how quickly the weeks pass by, and this is supposed to be their innocent, fun-filled years (just wait until they get my age!).

And we aren’t even allowed to think too long about 1999 because of all the fuss being raised over the MELENIUM 2000 . . . PLEASE!

I know with myself, if I don’t put forth a real effort, my “I’m going to do’s” turn out to be “I was going to do!”

Putting things in priority should be our first priority! But, “can we talk here?” This kind of self-discipline is not easy. With everything crowding in on us it seems we are over-taken and our priorities become a “ball of confusion.”

What’s the answer? And this is not easy either! We’ve got to quit putting more in one day than we can handle. Oh yeh! Sounds like a great revelation? No, it’s an old answer for a new problem. Just a simple answer. But, like the old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” No one can do it for us (they’ve got their own problems).

It won’t happen over-night! But what’s your peace of mind worth? For more information, read your Bible daily.

HERE WE GO!

As we prepare to take our Junior High kids to church camp up in Illinois, our kid's greatest fear is if they'll be able to pack their five pairs of shoes and still have room for their blow dryer! Meanwhile, another lady and myself who are taking them are plotting out the route, hoping we can get around Chicago without making a wrong turn and ending up in Albuquerque. The kids are worrying about their acne while we are thinking about flat tires, gas mileage and the kids getting car sickness.

When we first received the info about camp, oh, about eight months ago, it seemed like a great idea! So, we sold ink pens, candy, and worked to raise the money to go, and guess what, WE DID IT! But now that the months have melted down to days, reality has set in. "Hey, you're getting ready to take these kids and head out hundreds of miles from home! That's a big responsibility! Are you really up to it?" Well, I'd better be, 'cause we've come too far to turn back now. Oh, really?

"I don't know, but I think I'm feeling a little bit feverish." And the kids' response to that would be, "take two aspirin and we'll call (about fifteen times) tomorrow." But as I think back to my days as a teenager, I thank God for those adults who were willing to take on big responsibilities; those who would say "Let's make some memories," and prayed as they introduced me to new experiences that seeds would be sown in my heart, not realizing then that, yes, gas mileage had a higher priority than if Jimmy Joe would like me or hold my hand.

Jerry's Grandmother shared some valuable advice with me one day, when she told me "You can't make children be adults and adults be children." Thank God!

You see, I'm supposed to be thinking about exits and tire pressure, 'cause I'm the adult. And it's really okay if they pack three suit cases and a trunk so as not to forget anything, because I already know they are gonna have to carry all that stuff about a half a mile to their cabin. They still have to experience it. And, yes, bug spray is more important than hair spray. That wasn't a lesson I forgot and neither will they.

But the one experience I am looking forward to for them, is to gather in the tabernacle with hundreds of kids, praising the Lord in song and worshipping together, seeing for themselves that they are not alone with their struggles and insecurities, and that the same Gospel they hear at home over and over, is really the same one they'll hear at camp, but delivered by someone new with a fresh way that will revive their faith and make them more determined.

And when the week is done, with hugs and goodbyes to their new found friend, they'll still be the kids wanting to get home to go to the fair. I'll be the adult facing the Chicago traffic, believing the Lord is pleased and He'll get us home safe, to ride another day and experience a "New Work," He has for us. (SERVING A LIVING GOD WILL PUT LIFE INTO YOUR LIFE).

I Went Looking and I Saw

The rolling waves crash upon the shore
The sound of a Mighty God.
With all its force and fury
How can it calm me so inside?
I guess it's a peace in knowing
A Mighty God.
So many come to see its beauty
And live its rushing water
I'm wondering, "Do they also view this greatness
As their Heavenly Father?"
One with might and wonder
Words cannot explain
Could bring a peace and solitude
Unable to buy with money.
And yet, as great as this scene
There's One yet greater still,
It's all these souls of all these men
This Mighty God can fill.
This Mighty Ocean that will not discriminate,
It doesn't care the color of my skin
Where I am going
Or where I have been.
Its water will cool the rich and spray upon the poor
The sun will shine upon us all
Not judging about our rises
Or our falls.
I could never make an impression
Upon this mighty scene
It even washes away the prints
I left behind with my feet.
I have no proof I've been here,
My family can only guess,
By the smile on my face, the calm in my soul!

But once again I have seen
The evidence of my Mighty God.
(Dedicated to my Sister)

“I’m A Sinner”

The other day I went out to distribute some of our tracts. I have a route I cover every so often, kind of like the “Bunny Bread” truck. I stopped in at one of the Laundromats in Scottsburg and as I went through the door, I spotted this man reading a magazine. He lifted his eyes from reading and I smiled at him, at the same time noticing his tee-shirt which read “I’m A Sinner.”

As I turned around from placing my tracts where the rest of the tracts were located, he gave me this “I just dare you” look. Well, I didn’t. I just smiled and said something like “How about those Wildcats?” (my little voice told me that if this guy was brave enough to wear such a message that he could probably back it up, you know?). Of course, my first response was “What nerve!” But then, I remembered some of my own shirts that also carried the message of my belief. I was reminded of that “freedom of religion” (or lack of it) part in our constitution.

Oh, I could have met this guy’s challenge but I believe this man was wearing this advertisement for just that very reason; kind of like he had drawn a line in the dirt.

As I got into my car to finish the route, I did pray for him, not because I felt like I was better than him, but because at one time in my life I also wore a shirt that said, “I’m A Sinner,” maybe not literally. But I will say this: While in that sin state I wasn’t proud of it!

Today our society says “God forbid anyone might be made to feel guilty!” And I’ll agree with that if it is guilt over other’s convictions, but what about the guilt one should feel when they realize they have failed a perfect, loving Lord? The time of being made accountable for one’s actions is quickly and quite affectively

being replaced by a time of self-justification. But don't you agree that when all the excuses, blaming others, and reasoning fall away, truth is all that will be left? No illusions; no fiction. It's like the story about the proud father who was watching his son's marching band.

With

every turn and maneuver performed the son did the opposite. The father's response was, "Look at that! The entire band is out of step except for my son!"

Please! I believe in positive reinforcement, but how about positive truth? "Kid, you need to try and make more of the practices." And the positive truth for this man is "Sir, you have the freedom to believe any way you want. You can flaunt it, scream it from the house top, but is it bringing peace to your life?" Now tell the truth . . .

Just Kidding . . .

“Just Kidding!” Oh, really? “Many a truth hath been said in jest.” Well, honey, let’s just call it what it really is. “Just kidding” has become a cloak to cover up what you don’t have the nerve to say. You see this a lot in the work place and it’s a shame because it has made people suspicious and you really can’t just kid any more.

The pass-time, or the big thing any more is to belittle or poke fun at others. People you don’t know and don’t want to know become the target of belittlement for the moment.

I can’t get into that at all, can you? And really, we can discern what’s said in fun and what’s said to tear down (people must think we’re slow). I know, it’s more fun to poke at an issue you know the other person feels a little self-conscious about, but it’s not funny if both people aren’t laughing, is it? I always get a “red flag” when the deliverer of the joke laughs harder than the receiver. At who’s expense is this little time of merriment? Then, when you call their hand at what they’ve said, and I love this, they come back with “Well, I was just kidding! Can’t you take a joke?” Yes, but I haven’t heard one yet, bucko! Tell me something funny and I’ll laugh with you, you know! I mean, they have insulted you, and then they want to question why they can’t. Oh man!

I know it’s dangerous when we take even our own selves to seriously. We most definitely need to lighten up, but I like knowing if I’m just sparring with someone or has he or she got their boxing gloves on and should I be expecting a “knock-out” punch or not?

In the “Bambi” movie, Thumper was always being called down by his mom. “Thumper, if you can’t say something nice don’t say anything at all.” Boy, that would sure limit some people’s conversation in a day’s time. “Good morning - - - Good night.”

Keep Flying High

The other day, as I enjoyed my favorite spot on our “Ponderosa” (the swing in the back yard), I looked up (and, by the way, that’s a great direction to look) and saw a hawk being attacked by a group of smaller birds.

Every time the big hawk tried to gain altitude, those smaller birds would swoop down in a kinda like a “peck by” action driving the hawk down. These birds worked as a team, each taking their turn as if they knew that if they allowed the hawk to soar above them, they would lose control of the situation, and their main objective was to keep the hawk under them.

I wondered if this was a ritual or defensive maneuver. So, if anyone is a brain about birds instead of being a bird-brain like me, feel free to enlighten me, okay?

As these birds flew out of sight, I felt sorry for the hawk. I mean, enough is enough! It seemed that the power these birds had found over this hawk had gone to their heads, but then, I am a real marshmallow when it involves an underdog. I’ve been known to change my support in the middle of a basketball game when one team is just whippin’ up on the other team. I’m just not a sports fan if there’s no real sport involved.

We’ve seen this same kind of treatment toward people all our lives. In school or at work, if someone is viewed as “different” they might as well walk around with a “kick me” sign on their back. And as more and more people join the “football team” it can be changed to a “bring your own place setting” sign for this feeding frenzy.

What’s this about anyway? Anyone that knows anything about God’s nature knows this kind of behavior is not his way. I mean, come on, are people so insecure about their own individuality, and

most important, their ability to accept people, or at best, allow people to be their own person?

It makes you wonder how old John the Baptist was received coming in his camel hair, eating locust and honey. Boy was he different! But he got everyone's attention as he brought to them (and to us) a very important message: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John was probably pecked at a lot, but 2000 years later we read his great message and know his name while we are just wondering, "what were those other guys names?"

LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN WHILE THEY PLAY (Ain't It Kinda Funny What The Children Say?)

These stories are true. The names are not changed because I'm the one who looks like a nut, but the other characters are very innocent. They are children!

While working with the Head Start program a few years ago, it was Speech Therapy Day. The children were leaving and returning to the room as their turn came to go for therapy. One little boy left the room and was gone for a while. When he returned, being the concerned teacher I was, I started asking him questions like, "Did you have fun?" "How did things go?" and on and on. I noticed the puzzled look on his face and the lady working with me was busting a gut. "What?" I asked her. "Ms. Debbie, he went to the restroom."

After Christmas I was interacting with one little girl as she told me all the things she had gotten for Christmas. "Did Santa bring you all these presents?" I asked. "No" she replied. "Well, where did you get them, then?" I asked. "I got them at the 'Getting Place'" was her response (she must have visited Grandma).

Meg, my daughter, was wanting to ride her bike, and of course it had just rained. I told her she might get muddy and she assured me she would ride slow (you know the drill). After just a short time she huffed back in the house, mud spattered from head to toe. As she stomped passed me, I heard her say (talking more to herself than to me) "You just can't trust that mud!"

God loves the little children and why not? They're more his kind of people.

My Mother

My Mother's sickness and death about a year ago with Alzheimer's brought to me a great insight or revelation that has since changed my life. An individual does not have to be up in years or ill to not have a "quality life." The quality of life comes from what we obtain from the time we are blessed here on this earth.

It seems our society is telling us happiness comes from whatever they are selling: Cars, homes, jeans, etc. Then we see people bound up with their work and other obligations, can I name a few? Our children's activities at school; organizations that will find a few good workers and then work them to death (this includes church work); an obsession for perfection in our dwellings; entertainment; running ourselves ragged to obtain some rest and relaxation "cause we deserve it!", and others too numerous to mention.

We find ourselves used-up pretty quickly. We need to remember, God's yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). I'm not saying we shouldn't do any of these things but we should allow these things to bring us a quality of life that fulfills, not overfills us.

With our technologies like same day delivery, how can it be that we are still pressed for more time? Well folks, here's what I've been shown and you know it also, but this is just a reminder. We are not super people! We can't continue to fill every minute of our days and expect to have a quality of life that brings us peace.

We must take the time (not find the time) to, if I might be allowed to coin a phrase, "stop and smell the roses" especially those we have planted and cared for just because raising them brought us a better quality of life. Each of us know what brings us inner peace and a sense of satisfaction and its past time we just

did it. I know. I've been there by saying "One of these days I'm gonna ...". If we don't stop and review our own lives and take the first step in bringing back to our homes, churches, and communities, the quality of life the good Lord intended, we can keep on expecting to read headlines about divorce, suicide, and murders that are getting closer and closer to our own homes. John 14:27 says "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid . . ."

NO SENSE . . .

I CAN'T MAKE ANY SENSE OUT OF IT! But can anyone with any sense make sense of such a senseless act as what happened in Colorado? I, like you, only know what I've heard through the Media. But I've heard enough to know these "gun boys" had a plan. It wasn't like they "snapped" that morning. They had plenty of opportunities to turn that "Black Day" into another Spring school day. But they DID NOT! They had a chance to get help, BUT DID NOT!

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to see there is a very powerful force at work here. Too many see Satan as a pitch-fork totten', red-eyed character to be dressed like on Halloween. As long as he is viewed as such, he is safe. But, believe you me, his power is not to be laughed at. As long as we think like that, he will get the last laugh, he thinks!

Like these boys, Satan has a plan! He does not value life. His main thrust is to seek and destroy, and on Tuesday, April 20th, once again he had his day. Please believe me when I say that I'm not suggesting that we accept that cop-out, "the devil made me do it!" These boys, like us, had a will which we are all born with. God gave it to mankind in the "garden." God wanted man to obey because man wanted to, not because he was made to. Apparently, Satan's will was accepted by these boys, making it their own wills, and the result – Death and pain to each family like they've never felt before.

John 10:10 calls Satan (the one in the black hat) a thief that steals, kills and destroys. Friends, he doesn't MESS AROUND! He is one, if you give him an inch, he'll take a life. These boys gave him a lot more than a small part of their life; they gave their very lives, and stole all those other lives also. It would seem like Satan had won, but I'm hearing news of how the ones who were killed had a very strong force in their lives also. John 10:10 tells us that

Jesus (the One in the white hat) came to give us life. Not just abundant life here, but eternal life forever in a place so much better than what we will ever know on this Earth.

No, they didn't receive the consolation prize but they have received the eternal prize. See, Satan may think he has the last laugh, but with Christ it doesn't end here. It's only the beginning for those who know Christ. His evil force will affect us all as long as people don't call black – black.

And, yes, he will have his days, but be encouraged. He may have his days, but our Lord has eternity for those who acknowledge His power.

We pray for these families, that they too will find peace in knowing their loved ones are in that heavenly place, and that they will allow that peace to put it right back in Satan's face!

Comparing Battle Scars Never Helps

Most hunters will tell you that a wounded animal is a lot more dangerous than one that's not. Well, I've found out that a "hurt" Christian can be dangerous too. I read somewhere that the "Church" is the only group of people who still shoot their wounded. But friend, after counseling with, praying with, and trying to restore someone that's been hurt in the Church for a long period of time, you feel like shooting them yourself, if nothing else but to get them out of their misery, their family's and the Church's.

Please understand, I'm not writing about a young Christian who is in the process of maturing in the Lord. I'm speaking about someone who's been in the word for years, has taught Sunday School, and they have "their" pew in the sanctuary, and, well, you get the picture.

An evangelist I enjoy listening to has a saying that states "hurting people hurt people," and that statement is sure true about a hurt Christian. But they end up doing the most hurt to the building-up of the Kingdom of God.

In reality, they take a razor to the Church's wrist every time they bad mouth someone in that body of people, slowly killing the effectiveness of that person's or the Church's witness. And what's really wild is, it's usually an unbelieving loved-one they pick to "vent" to. HELLO! Get a clue people! When you've patched up your differences with brother or sister so and so, and when you've hugged and experienced the power of Christ's true forgiveness, guess what? Those words you spoke to you know who won't just go away.

That person doesn't understand that kind of forgiveness, and all they know is: Someone who was supposed to have the love of the Christ in their life has really hurt someone they love. I'm sure

I've disappointed or hurt people before, but, guess what: I've been hurt and disappointed too. Hasn't everyone? But folks, how many "I'm sorrys" or "forgive me's" does it take? How much "penitence" does a person have to pay? And the biggest question is "Why get mad at God?" He didn't do it. Who are we trying to serve anyway?

My mother-in-law has a saying also, and I use it quite often. It says "enough is enough, and too much is nasty!" King David writes in the 38th chapter of Psalms, verse 5, "My wounds stink." Of course, he is speaking of physical wounds, but friends, it's past time we start allowing our wounds to heal. And the healing balm is the love we have for Christ and Him alone. Then we start the process of loving and trusting Christ and His people once again. And really, isn't it up to us how long we "lick" our wounds?

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

I'm becoming more and more concerned about an issue I'm sure you've probably seen lately as well. That issue deals with the lack of respect and fear toward God. When I use the word "fear" I mean the kind we have toward our Earthly Father, knowing the position and power they have.

I'm seeing people who are "bar-hoppers" and unbelievers stand and proclaim "I'm just as good as you are" (comparing themselves to a person who doesn't "bar-hop" and is dedicated to pulling themselves out of bed every Sunday, giving at least part of their time-tithe to gather with their flock).

Well, excuse me, but no you "ain't!" And, here it comes . . . you're judging me! You're not supposed to judge!! "My God loves me and understands me!" And on and on . . . You may ask "How does she know about all these defenses?" Because I've used all of them! "I think thou protests too much."

If you've read any of my articles you know I'm big in believing about the love of Christ. The Lord loves us and we can't do anything to keep Him from loving us. He will love us as we slip into hell, if that's the case. But you see, His love toward us is not enough to change the situations in our lives. It also takes our love toward Him. Some Americans have become so de-sensitized to the message of "Jesus loves you," that they show no respect for this perfect Sovereign Savior. What nerve!

I guess we could go off on the entertainment world and all that, but how about we keep this personal? Okay? How long has it been since you just really stopped and thought about the God Who made all you see around you? He's the God Who enables you to move and think; the God Who has blessed you to live in America; the God Who says "Son, I'm not just providing for you here, but I've

made provisions for you after this life.” Can you tell me that you don’t think about that God and feel respect for Him?

If you can tell me that your life style would make this God proud of you, then I’ll shut-up. Boy, I heard some “amen’s” go out then! Tell me that when you hear someone use the Lord’s Name in vain and curse Him that you cringe inside, and that a little bit of rage rises up inside of you because they’ve just bad mouthed your Father. Believe it or not, God does expect something from us; not just our lip service of “I love you’s.” But He said “Kid-O, if you love me, you’ll keep My commandments.” He is saying here, “if you love Me prove it!” Prove it by loving My word also. Christ’s love is not an “out” to do anything we want but it’s an “in” to the life He has for us, not just now but after this life. Our respect and love toward Him now will determine if when we stand before Him, He is our Judge or Savior then. And, believe you me, it it’s as judge there will be plenty of fear. But if it’s as Savior we won’t have any trouble showing respect and love, because that’s the only way He can become our Savior now!

“Ridem’ Cowboy”

Riddle: What thing can no man tame?

Answer: James 3:8 HET UOTNGE

Pause. Times up. Let’s see, how many sayings can we think of about the MOUTH? “My mouth overloaded my brain . . . ““I spoke before I thought . . . ““Bite your tongue . . . ““I put my foot in my mouth . . . “I’m sure some of you can think of more, but you get the idea. James says we can’t tame our tongue, it’s evil, and full of deadly poison.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” What a big falsehood! Words do hurt! They are deadly according to James. Also, Proverbs 18:21 tells us that death and life is in the power of the tongue. Death of children’s spirits, friendships, marriages, and parent-child relationships. Sisters and brothers have separated never to speak again because of words. Death of church families that not only killed their friendships but caused a little death to those who don’t go to church because they are on-lookers not really understanding that Christians are human and without Christ’s help and self-discipline will speak deadly words instead of life-giving words. “You’re beautiful!” “You’re so smart!” “I love you!” “You’re the apple of my eye!” “I don’t agree with you, but I will respect your view.” “I know things don’t look so good but I believe it’s going to get better.” Life giving words!

Is it really that important that we be heard all the time? And believe me when I say, not everyone really wants to hear what we think! Especially if it’s words of death to them.

Rotten, Just Plain Rotten!

I returned home the other day, to find that one of our large trees had “bit the dust.” I was upset to a degree, but, hey, we really knew it was going to come down sooner or later, we were just praying for later. We knew the tree wasn’t in good shape and I’d put dirt around it, doctored it with some special spray, and had been praying for it. I was committed to saving that shade tree! And some of you may be thinking, “she just needs to be committed!”

But the tree had some kind of disease. It hadn’t leaved out this year, and it really seemed doomed. And to add “insult to injury” a big old redheaded woodpecker decided to work on it with a vengeance. I couldn’t chase that bird away! I guess it had found a free smorgasbord and when it did finally fly away, it left a hole as big as a cannon ball (well, almost).

Later that day, when I had picked Megan up from school and was pulling in the driveway, she saw the tree had fallen and was NOT going to get up. Her first response was “dog-on that wood pecker!” And it was true the tree had broken off right where “Woody” had left its calling card. But what she didn’t see was the inside of the tree, after being exposed by the break – IT WAS ROTTEN! The big, old maple tree hadn’t come down because of the injuries sustained from the woodpecker, and it hadn’t fallen even because of the wind. That tree came down because of what had happened to it on the inside. It’s being rotten on the inside was what brought on the demise of the tree, not all the outward signs or circumstances.

Even though we want to say and believe what has happened to us or even what has been said to us, is what has caused our fall, the truth is, what is happening on the inside, while all these things are going on, is what has really caused it. It’s no little matter for a

person to stay healthy on the inside (in their spirit) because we humans are so affected by what we think, feel, see, hear, and etc. But that area seems to be the one we are least concerned with.

You know, Jesus didn't leave here without also leaving us the resources to see this thing through. He tells us He wants us to prosper and be in health even as our soul prospers (from the inside out) 3 John 3.

SNEAKY SNAKES

“Proceed with caution” - You know, that sign is put up for a reason! Oh, I know how we think it’s there for liability purposes. But, the other day, while cleaning up a mess of limbs that Mother Nature started and I needed to finish, this message became very real to me. As I proceeded to gather and drag these limbs back to our “burning spot,” I saw what I thought was a “big” snake laying on one of the limbs. You know, they are very grouchy when awakened on a cool Autumn morning. This snake was cold and wouldn’t move. I took a stick (a very long stick) and tried to encourage it to just move on. To my surprise it was not one snake but FOUR grouchy, cold snakes!

This situation took on a whole new meaning when I realized I was dealing with a mass of snakes instead of just one, because I’m thinking “Hey, I can keep my eye on one snake, but four?” This new information made me step back (way back) and re-evaluate the challenge before me. Do I kill them? Do I abandon this project? (hey, this would be a good enough reason to leave this job for Jerry).

But I pressed on, with caution, checking the area around each limb, checking out each one. I even caught myself later on that day, when unloading my dryer, shaking out my towels, sheets, and “Fruit of the Looms” with more caution.

This eye-opening experience didn’t fill me with fear, it increased my confidence in myself. I used common sense, and the fact that “there are snakes out here!” and finished the job I started. Fear limits us (II Timothy 1:7). God doesn’t give us a spirit of fear . . . Read it! It’s good.

THE BOX

Picture it! The little tot tears into his or her present and, after finally reaching the prize that seemed to them was wrapped in three layers of paper and held together with super tape, they start to crawl in the BOX! They climb on top of the BOX. The BOX becomes a car or a train; it becomes to them anything their imagination will allow it to be. Meanwhile, that \$50.00, I MUST HAVE toy lays ignored until they get over the BOX thing. Here we are, sitting with our mouths dropped open, wondering why we hadn't gone down to the local supermarket and picked up a whole set of BOXES for nothing.

And as I thought about this scene, I began to wonder if maybe this is not what has happened to us. Why is it that we have such a hard time with "balance" in our lives? We, as Americans, seem to swing from one high point to another. Have we gotten so carried away with the idea of the Christmas season (the box) that we have forgotten the Gift (Jesus)? I know what you're thinking, "This has been done to death!" Myself, I really enjoy Christmas, the lights and giving spirit; it is a great time of the year. Families are getting together, and churches are making fruit baskets and Christmas caroling, and working on the Christmas play that's held together with pins and prayer, all these things bless me! But all these acts of kindness and good will have to be because of the Gift (Jesus). They are the by-products of His birth. It has to be more than just a "sweet story."

His birth brought a truth to us that says He wants us to be in that same spirit of love toward our fellow man all year long. You see, the Gift (Jesus) is a gift that just keeps giving and giving, it's not like the decorations that are stored away after the New Year, and then dragged back out after Thanksgiving to be displayed as a sign that says "It's that time of year AGAIN! And, by the way, they are in a BOX along with most of the gifts we unwrap on Christmas

morning, not to mention the BOX those after-Christmas bills puts us in with our pay checks.

America, we are blessed! But only because of the GIFT that came with almost no glitter, whistles, or ribbon. His wrapping was swaddling clothes, and His box was a cow's trough, but, man! What a GIFT!

This Inquiring Mind Would Like to Know . . .

Is there a universal guideline to determine if an individual is a hypocrite or not?

Or does each person make up their own guidelines?

And if that's the case, can that same set of guidelines be used on its original owner?

And if they could how would that person fair using their own guidelines?

Does a person have to attend church to earn the right to be called a hypocrite?

Should we just drop the term "Christian" and replace it with hypocrite?

Since that's the reason why a lot of people use for not attending church, should all hypocrites be asked to leave?

And if so, whose set of guidelines would be used to cull-out those hypocrites?

Would there be anyone left to ask those people to leave?

If all those people won't attend church because of all those hypocrites, who's gonna show us people how it's done right?

What would God do with all that extra time He would normally spend listening to prayers from hypocrites and answering them?

In Matthew 11:19, when Jesus was talking about John the Baptist, and telling how he came not eating and drinking, and some

claimed John had a devil, then Jesus spoke of Himself, how He had come eating and drinking, and some called Him a gluttonous winebibber. Were they calling John and Jesus hypocrites?

If all the hypocrites were removed from the churches what excuse would non-church people use for not attending church?

Are most Christians really tired of being called hypocrites by individuals who aren't even trying to do better? YES!

The Strongest Four-Letter Word

L O V E

It's hard to believe that someone like Jesus could ever love someone like me. A Man without sin; the God-Man who knew no hatred, jealousy, resentment, self-justification, and I could go on and on. A Man who loved me so much He was willing to die a terrible, painful death.

Jesus' thirty-three years was for that very purpose. To show us true love and teach us how we ought to love. This supernatural love that's way beyond our nature, and beyond what we can do by ourselves.

Even the roughest of rough will, when "rubber meets the road," defend "The Man." "The Man" is to be respected, and I've seen them willing to fight for Him, and I mean FIGHT for Him. They may not be living His word, but they know He loves them. It may be a lingering message given to them by a loving Christian Mom or Grandmother, but they will fight for that truth. Their life-style may not be reflecting any other truths of the word, but "The Man" loves them. When no one else loves me, or I don't even love myself, I can have that hope that I am loved by someone – By a perfect Man!

His grace is beyond our comprehension **TO BE FORGIVEN!** To start anew! With God this is possible, but with our fellowman it's impossible. Man has no power to forgive sin. Only the God-Man Who never committed any sin has that power or right. And the amazing part is, He does it all because He loves us. Not to condemn us or shame us. It's really hard to believe this truth, but everyone can, even me or you. John 3:16-17.

There is A God And I'm Not Him

Two things I've learned in my lifetime are: (1) There is a God, (2) I'm not Him. This is a line I heard while watching an old movie the other night and it really stuck with me. It sounds simple but it is profound. These two revelations could bring a lot of peace to all our lives. To acknowledge and believe there is a Higher Being Who sees and cares about us will bring peace to us. He is a power that I consider supernatural because He confounds all natural thinking. When I use the word "believe" I mean the kind of belief that would make us run from a burning building when someone informed us that it was on fire. It is a belief that makes us move, not just a "I believe it might snow" belief.

We must come to the knowledge that we are not God and that we all have limitations, and that we do need help sometimes, a supernatural help that we can't explain. We must admit, "No, we can't fix every situation;" "No, we don't have all the right answers to all the questions"; "No, we are not the Great Choir Director of the world!"

Needing help may seem like a sign of weakness to some people. To ask for it makes a big lump in their throat. But one thing is for certain; everyone will sooner or later need help. The great thing about asking for help from God is that no one needs to know except Him and the one who has just realized He's not Him! (Hebrews 4:15-16).

They Stopped The Traffic Just For Me

This morning as I drove Megan to school (by the way, she wasn't wanting to go so it really was driving her, not just transporting here there), the Lord favored me with a sight that lifted my spirit which had been feeling a little low. The traffic, this morning, was like it is a lot of mornings, spaced out to where it was not safe to make the left hand turn into the school entrance. So, we sat at the cross-walk. Megan was feeling better about the day since she had realized it was FRIDAY.

Time was ticking by and the list of things I needed to get accomplished for the day was growing bigger by the minute. As I half listened to Megan and watched for my opportunity to make my turn (on two wheels if necessary), I noticed these two little girls walking up the side walk toward the cross-walk. I'd say they were about six and seven years old. They weren't wearing brand-named clothing, and wore no jacket on this cool October morning, as my "Mom's" eye observed. But their faces were bright as they hugged their books up to their chests and continued to make their way to the destined cross-walk area.

Then, it happened. The six foot plus police officer, clad in blue, walked out in the middle of the highway, and with the authority his uniform carried, stuck his hand up in the air. All the on-coming traffic stopped and with his other hand he motioned for the girls to proceed across the road. Folks, I would to God everyone could have seen these little girl's faces. They straightened their shoulders and marched across that highway, and when they looked at me with the sweetest smiles, well, if they had been angels, it wouldn't have touched me anymore. The Lord allowed me, at that moment, to feel what these little girls were feeling. This everyday procedure that a lot of children would view as a hassle was to these little girls an honor, and sent them the message that said, "You are special! They have stopped the traffic just for you!" And even though there

was a hint of them feeling uncomfortable about all the fuss being made over them, they continued to smile and it seemed to me they were a little taller when they reached the other side of the road.

I prayed, “Lord, don’t allow anything to happen today that would steal this special feeling these girls received from this special treatment” (even though it was only special to them).

As I dropped Megan off and continued back home, I too realized that the Lord, allowing me to be a part of this scene, had also stopped the traffic for me. The responsibilities and the time schedule that seemed so important had been replaced by the message delivered in a child’s smile that said “You are special.”

The word of God tells us that the natural man can’t understand spiritual things and the natural man might be saying, “Big whoopee!” But by being able to see with a spiritual eye, you could save yourself thousands of dollars; dollars spent on St. John Warts and all those things claiming to give you a sense of well-being. My “sense of well-being” was feeling more “well” when I returned home and it only cost me the time to see God’s love for these little girls, if only I and they viewed it as such.

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving - Giving Thanks

Is there a new thought I can give to you about Thanksgiving? Maybe just a “Now” thought, one that we know, or have known, but need reminded of. The true meaning of these special holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, etc. has suffered because of the same reason our family unity and church unity have begun to suffer - Lack of commitment.

Commitment and enthusiasm are two elements we need to make anything special. It's contagious (enthusiasm). I'm not saying to make it bigger and better (remember, we're talking about the true meaning of this holiday). “GIVING THANKS.” I'm talking about the enthusiasm to gather our loved ones together (even if you haven't seen your brother for a year). “Don't make plans, we are going to be together Thanksgiving Day.”

Commitment” - “I'll BE there!” “I won't let work, friends, or high water keep me away!” Thanksgiving is not necessarily a Christian holiday, but freedom for it was one reason for the big move. These holidays are not nearly as old as the “Gospel Story,” but like it, time has not smothered out, lack of commitment not stopped it, nor lack of enthusiasm silenced it, because, contrary to opinion, most American people know where their strengths and blessings come from and we are THANKFUL.

The “biggy” that robs us of being thankful is always wanting more. This drive has become a monster eating up any sense of accomplishment and thankfulness before we can enjoy it. Being thankful is an attitude that should be present in our lives all the year, not just on Thanksgiving Day. But it's nice we have a day off work to celebrate it. That's one thing we can be thankful for, Amen?

Wash Day

The Lord has always used simple things to teach me lessons. In 1 Corinthians 1:27 it tells us that God will use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and, please know, I'm not saying I'm a wise person even though I have been accused of being a "wise guy." But it's okay with me that God uses simple things, I guess He knows me well enough to know He has to reach me at my level.

The other day, while doing my laundry, I thought, "I wish I had a lint tray in my life." Wouldn't it be great to step in a machine and when the cycle was finished all the stuff clinging to me that I don't need would be caught in a trap to be thrown in the trash?

In reality, we do go around and around with ourselves while dealing with a weakness needing to be changed. Things can get pretty heated up when one comes face to face with a truth about one's self. And we're hoping we can do this on the "delicate cycle selection" only to realize it's gonna take that "heavy duty heat" to get the job done.

But I thank the Good Lord He is to us when going through these changes, like a softener sheet, knowing without Him we might feel pretty rough when the cycle has ended. It can be like those clothes we dry too hot that come out so wrinkled we have to start the process all over again. The best method I've found is to use a "lighter heat with a longer drying time" allowing enough time to get rid of those unwanted "lint balls," and allowing them to fall off of us and not be burnt off. I thank God for His patience and long-suffering He has for us. Contrary to those around us who would really just like to "hang us out to dry" when it comes to attitude improvements we need to make.

When the process is completed in our lives, we come out much cleaner and smelling so much fresher, and having fewer lint balls hanging on us than before. But I don't guess it will ever matter to some folks how many balls get trapped in our lint trap, there will always be someone picking at us, trying to change us. Let's not allow them to make us "permanent (de) pressed" when the Lord is wanting us to be "wash-n-wear."

Which Hat Do I Wear Today?

Father's Day is this Sunday! Don't forget to honor your father with a gift, card, or maybe his favorite meal. You know, our father's wear a lot of different hats and below are a few examples:

A BANKER: Giving loans with no interest in paying them back.

A LAWYER: Pleading their children's case to neighbors, family members, and teachers with a lot of objections.

A JUDGE: Pronouncing the sentencing, always wondering, "did the punishment fit the crime? Was I too hard or not hard enough?"

A COUNSELOR: Trying to understand and be sensitive when in reality thinking "that was a real dumb move!"

A FOOTBALL PLAYER: "Do I pass off to Mom? The clock is ticking and no matter what I do I'm gonna be called for 'unnecessary roughness.'"

Seriously, being a father these days carries a lot more involvement than it used to, and rightly so. My Father's job description appeared to me to be the Provider, Disciplinarian, and Protector. But now-a-days, as it has been proven how important a father's influence is on his children, they are required to have more "hands on involvement." And in reality, can a father sleep-walk through their children's growing years and then expect to be included in their "grown-up" years? In studying the Word of God, I see that fathers have a big responsibility. Ephesians 3:14-15 tells me the very title of "Father" derives from our Heavenly Father – God. I've seen the job and I sure don't want it! But I believe the most important responsibility a father has is to teach by example: How important it is to know, respect, and love the Heavenly Father. We've all noticed how a father's interests quickly becomes his

children's interests also, whether it is fishing, hunting, race cars, basketball, stamp collecting, or whatever. Fathers, you do deserve honor and respect and a day set aside just for you. And when you show your Heavenly Father honor and respect in your life every day, your children will see how important that is to you and they will follow suit. This is not just a life lesson; you are teaching them it's a "Life-After-This-Life" lesson.

Happy Father's Day, Dad! We love you!

Who Needs that Kind of Pressure

I'll admit, I did laugh when I heard this news story a few months ago. The story was about a youth pastor who was supposed to bring the morning message that Sunday. He didn't have a message so he went back in the office and called in a bomb threat at the church. Of course, they cleared the building, and he didn't have to worry about the message (which he didn't have), but he did have to deal with the fact that the fire department had traced the call back to the church.

BUSTED!

“Desperate times call for desperate measures.” I don't know this guy's heart and I feel sorry for him. There must have been a lot of pressure on him to deliver. Maybe it was put there more by himself than anyone else.

When I laughed about this story it was more out of disbelief than “What a goof ball!” kind of laugh. If he pulled this stunt to save face, it didn't work! His degree of embarrassment was multiplied by thousands compared to what he would have felt if he would have “fessed-up.”

Why do we make things so complicated for each other? The big “P” word, “Pride” I guess. “For My yoke (the Lord's) is wholesome (useful, good) – not harsh, hard, sharp or pressing, but comfortable, gracious and pleasant, and My burden is light and easy to bare.” (Matthew 11:30, Amplified).

The un-churched world needs to know Christ came not only to give us eternal life, but help us get through this one. Grace: manifestation of favor especially by a Superior (God), mercy; pardon.

“You’re Not Me – But You Can’t Help It”

Some people go through life with their eyes wide open, and I’m that kind of person. If someone has a new hair-do I notice it, if they’ve gotten new glasses, I zero in on that. I can spot that kid clear across the shopping center that needs a new pair of shoes while packing around a \$25.00 “Star Wars” toy he’s getting ready to purchase; or that teenager who looks so unhappy. I am compelled to want to just give them a pat on the back or a hug. Sometimes I do, and other times I pray for them. Not everyone appreciates a strange middle-aged woman hugging them in public.

But going through life with your eyes wide open has its drawbacks too. We seem to see everything, but can do little about some situations. It exposes things to us that are just out of our control to change. And that’s really hard on those with the kind of personality that says, “Let’s do something!” even if it’s the wrong thing.

We are easily misunderstood by people, being accused of judging, being too nosy, and being a busy body. My Jerry (and I don’t believe he’ll mind my referring to him as mine, because whether he likes it or not, I’m his) is not a SEE-ALL kind of guy. I wonder if God doesn’t put two people so opposite together to entertain himself? They say opposites attract but do they really mean that they attack? Oh, we’ll say they complement each other. But until two people get to know one another and accept each other, it’s truer to say they complicate each other. But, praise the Lord, it does smooth out as each anniversary passes (it’s worth holding on).

I can say to Jerry, “did you see that man? He’s got a gun stuck in his belt . . .” and Jerry is straining just to see the man. I have painted our bathroom before, and in all fairness to Jerry, it wasn’t a drastic color change. But the only way he noticed I had painted that day was when he saw a spot of paint on my nose. “Ah, that’s

so sweet” you might say “he is so centered in on the love of his life, he sees nothing else around him.” Hey! That didn’t work for him either! He does think fast on his feet though. But remember, I see all, even desperation in one’s eyes.

Jerry has saved me and the family by having the personality he has. He’ll think about decisions that need to be made and situations that arise. He takes the time to pray about things, then he’ll move (never fast enough for me) with a clearer direction because he has thought about the possibilities that might result from a certain action taken. Consulting the Lord and being led by peace about that action taken didn’t hurt either.

We’ve heard it said, “It takes all kinds,” and you know, that’s truer than we realize. The longer I live and the longer I’m in this journey with the Lord the more thankful I am that God made us all different. We know Jesus is the Man, “The Son of God” that we most strive to be like. He has it ALL! But I’m thankful He didn’t say “Debbie, you be like Jerry,” or “Jerry, you be like Debbie,” or “Everybody, you be like your Pastor,” or your mom and dad. God knows what He’s getting when we first come to Him. He knows what He has to work with. But the best part is, He knows what we are going to become! Like the clay on the Potter’s wheel, the Lord will form us throughout our life, to be a beautiful and useful vessel, if we will yield to His molding, and stop trying to look and be like someone else’s cup or bowl.

Each time I try to take on someone else’s form, I can imagine in my mind’s eye the Potter shaking His head (maybe with a little smile), turning the wheel faster and saying “This is going to take longer than I thought.” And, I don’t know about you, but I’m going to hold on because I believe some of us are in for a wild ride . . .

Just a Warm Wash Rag

With the passing anniversary date of my mother's death, once again I walked down memory lane. Isn't it odd? How often losing someone close to you, a smell will bring a pain to your heart and the reality that they are not with you any more catches you off guard. It's not like you've forgotten that they are gone, or that you're in denial, but it's . . . an indescribable feeling.

For those of you who know what I'm saying, isn't it as if that smell takes you back to that very moment the two of you shared it together? For those of you who haven't experienced a great loss, it's okay if you don't understand.

I have to admit, I must have been naive or dumb when asked by a classmate in the first grade what my mother's name was and I replied "Mama." Hey, that's all I could remember her being called, and that is what most of her children called her until she passed away.

Mama was a spunky lady. She had the wrist action with a switch in her hand down to an art (the switch added balance). Her reflexes were keen and I should know, because every time I'd come back with an "I don't care" response, her eye/hand coordination hit the mark.

She would cook corn-on-the-cob in a canner. Biscuit dough rolled out on the table looked like the tablecloth. But Mama could also dance a pretty mean jig, and sing a "Kitty Wells" song that would bring a tear to your eye.

Mama didn't make excuses for any of her twelve children when they did wrong, but like most mama's, blamed herself for our lacking, contrary to today, when it seems it's always someone

else's fault when little _____ is caught red-handed committing a "no-no!"

My closest memory that proved Mama's love just for me was when I was young and she'd wake me up to go to school (I didn't like school – really, I didn't like getting up to go to school). Can anyone relate? After the hard time I'd given her, added to all the work she'd already done before she woke me up (I believe her morning "work-out" is where they got the line used in that Army advertisement: "We do more by 7 am than most people do all day"). But she would show me love by warming water on the stove and washing my face with a warm washrag. I deserved a lot less T.L.C. friend!

The scripture tells us that the small foxes spoil the vine and that's so true, but I'm so thankful for those small acts of love and how they can one day bring us comfort. It's amazing how I cannot feel the sting of one "switching" but when I need it most, even now in my adulthood, I can feel the warmth of that washrag on my face and the smell of "Ivory" soap. But come to think of it, she would get pretty aggravated later on when, brushing my hair. Paybacks are sweet, even for Mamas!

One Flew In This Coo Coo's Nest

I heard a racket in our fireplace this morning and went to investigate. A bird had made a wrong turn and had fallen, flown, or whatever, down the chimney and was caught in the flue. I couldn't see the winged prisoner but I knew its fate. I hated hearing its desperation but at least I didn't have to see it, which didn't last long.

In an hour or so I checked the glass doors only to find, guess what, looking back at me? You guessed right, a worn-out, soot covered, black bird, or, at least, it was black by now. I was glad the day's project demanded I be outdoors. I needed to think! You see, I've been in this situation before and I don't like a wild bird in the house; they are always flying in the same direction I'm running. I know it's fear that puts us both to flight, but that scene from the old Alfred Hitchcock movie "The Birds" fills my head. You know the scene, the one where the actress is trapped in the attic.

Well, the plot had thickened when I returned to check on the condition of the bird, hoping by some miracle it had flown back up the chimney. No chance. Instead, I found our family pet, Fluffy the cat, laying on the arm of a chair licking her chops.

"Okay Deb, it's time to take action (past time as far as the bird was concerned). A plan . . . I need a plan! Get rid of the cat . . . down in the basement; no biggy.

Shut all the doors to the other rooms . . . done. Hang sheets up at the doorways . . . got them covered (literally). Don't forget to turn the ceiling fan off . . . don't even want to think about it!

Okay, I'm ready . . . oh, I almost forgot . . . open the front door. Here goes nothing!" So, I opened the glass doors and guess what . . . it won't fly out. "Now listen, bird, here's your chance, you are

coming out of there!” And it did, in less than three seconds it found the opened front door and is still flying!

As that bird flew out the door, I really understood the meaning of the saying “free as a bird.” I know I felt free-er.

The Scripture found in Matthew chapter 10 came to my remembrance that tells us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground that God doesn’t notice. The Lord knew where that bird had fallen and He knew that I needed to be reminded that verse 3 tells me that I am more valuable than many sparrows.

It’s hard for people to believe that the God Who holds the universe in His hands can care about a sparrow. But this “Coo Coo” believes it and I also believe He can even use all of us “Coo Coos” when we do believe it. P.S. Fluffy had to settle for her “dinner in a can.”

Tongue-Tied (Make Mine a Double Knot)

Awhile back, I received a pamphlet in the mail announcing a Seminar to be held in Louisville. The title piqued my interest: “Communication with Diplomacy and Tact” because, believe it or not I do (and those who know me best DO! - I still believe it was one of those people that sent my name in) . . . but back to the subject, I thought “Hey, I could use a little data.” So, I continued to read the information. But when I got down to the bottom line (and know where that is, right?) the smaller print that starts out, “for the low cost of . . . “ I wasn’t very diplomatic when I said out loud “You’ve gotta be kiddin! \$395.00! I know education is expensive, but \$395.00!” That’s a lot of money to train someone to keep their mouth shut! And I don’t believe any man can really teach another person to do that – OOPS! (That wasn’t very tactful).

But seriously, I would have paid \$400.00 in the past to have something I’d said back. It would have been well worth the money to not have to say “I’m sorry” thirty times. Please don’t get me wrong, I don’t have a problem with saying “I’m sorry” (I’ve had a lot of practice) but I will admit I don’t say it unless I mean it.

To me, to say you are sorry when you are not is as bad as the mistake you’ve made. Most mature people will be understanding of a moment of insanity, or just getting caught up in the moment because they’ve been there before. But to be untruthful about our regret is a premeditated offense and it’s a “heart matter” (the truth will come out).

As you read the Four Gospels you will find that poor, old Peter had a “mouth problem.” Jesus was forever getting on his case. Peter lacked diplomacy and tact but Jesus knew that about Peter and loved him anyway. You see, Jesus knew what Peter was going to become. Peter was one of the disciples who said, “I’ll die for you, Jesus” and shortly after, denied even knowing Him. But later, after

Jesus had risen and revealed Himself to man, an angel sent a message to His disciples and asked for Peter by name. The result of that kind of love and forgiveness came when Peter stood up, preached, and three thousand people came to Christ.

Apparently, Peter's attendance at Jesus' seminar "Discipleship and Love" had paid off. And all it had cost him was a bruised ego every once in a while. As far as I know, the registration fee hasn't gone up and there's no limited seating. GOD'S STILL WORKING ON US! Matthew 26:33-35, Mark 16:5-7, Acts 2:37-41

Somebody Help The Boy!

Picture it: A toddler has somehow hoisted himself up on the tailgate of the family pick-up truck. His legs are dangling in the air, not having the strength to pull himself on up in the bed, but afraid to drop back to the ground which, at this point, seems to him to be a hundred-foot drop. As the father comes to his rescue, he hears the youngster cry “Someone help the boy!”

As the father caught his son up in his arms, he gave him a mini-lecture about the dangers of his actions, all the while laughing to himself about the youngster’s cry for help, and so glad at that moment he could be his son’s hero.

I believe deep inside of all of us is the dream of being a hero. You know, as we play a situation over in our mind, what if? - I came upon a burning house, or someone trapped in a car? - And don’t we all kinda envy that person who found the abandoned baby, just-in-the- nick-of-time!

I guess there are those who are satisfied just to mind their own business and take care of them and theirs, but I can’t help believe it’s a very few. I know not everyone has or will have the same experience when they come to Christ. But as I write this article, I believe many will relate.

When I met Jesus, I was like this little boy. My brain and will had gotten me into a place where I couldn’t pull it together, but I couldn’t let go for fear of where I’d land. My cry at that time was “Someone help the girl!” And even though there were a lot of caring, loving people who were willing to help me with their advice and lecture on how my actions were dangerous and could hurt me, it wasn’t enough, not until I came to the knowledge inside of me of Who God really is. I just kept dangling there, making a lot of noise and keeping people who loved me torn up.

But once I believed and was willing to let go of that tailgate, I felt a loving Father take me up in His arms and rescue me. Someone did help this girl, just like He has and will help all who call for it. Many of you who read this article can also say, "That was me!" That's how it is when we really see Christ (Savior: A person who saves, rescues, or delivers). The Son of God came as a man so he could know how we feel. He is not a high priest that can't be touched by our hurts and needs.

Some people might be asking, "Who does this woman think she is? Some kind of spiritual Guru?" No, I'm a little girl (in His eyes) that one day cried out "Someone help the girl!" and every day since has made that my heart's cry. Believe if you will, the Father wants to "help the kid – "

The “Yoke” Is On You

My cousin shared this story with us years ago and I think about it every time I find myself trying to please everyone. It's a true story about her, and you might see yourself in it; that's why it's so funny. She's the mother of five boys and her husband made six (counting almost-grown men). When she would go into the kitchen to prepare breakfast for her “small football team” their preference as to the method they wanted their eggs was “over-easy” (and who doesn't like a good fried over-easy egg?). As she would fry the eggs, if the yoke burst, she'd say to herself “I'll take that one.” Well, guess what she had when the eggs were fixed-up to their liking? You're right! She had accomplished her task in preparing her family's eggs as requested, but in the process, she was left with a plate full of “hard-yoked cholesterol.”

Mothers are so kind and giving and their wanting to please those they love just seems to come naturally. But let's be honest, after a couple of those eggs they would get pretty hard to swallow. And that's the way it is when trying to please everyone. At first, it's not too hard, but after a while it becomes more difficult to do when you realize your acts of kindness are being taken for granted.

Giving of one's self is most definitely a Christ-like characteristic. Jesus gave, and still gives constantly. He gives His time, and attention. He gives of His emotions, His love, and He gives us His “word” that He told us came straight from His Father. He told His disciples “I'll not call you servants but My friends, because all My Father has told Me, I've told you.”

But did 'cha ever notice that what Jesus gives is not temporal things? They are not just to cater to people but His acts of love are eternal. Those that followed after Him that had witnessed the feeding of the 5000 were told by Him “You're not following Me

because of the miracle You saw but to be filled; you had better work for that which is eternal.”

It was the love my cousin had for her “men” that made her want to fulfill their desired menu. She probably ended up with more than one plate of eggs, hard as bricks, because of that love. But, friends, the eggs were not the issue, and I hope her family saw that. It is her LOVE that IS eternal! When that love is replaced with duty it’s no longer an act that carries eternal power. When love is turned into resentment, and when we do things in that state, the tasks may be accomplished but the “yoke” is really on us.

Resentment will not lay dormant for long and it will rear its head in the form of arguments, ulcers, and headaches. It may just greet you in the form of scrambled eggs and a cold biscuit one morning, or maybe even a “Pop Tart.”

Let’s pray, not for more time or energy, but pure love and an honest heart that can say “no” sometimes, not just for eternal sakes, but also for those we love.

Thanks Cousin I.B.

Yoke: A symbol of servitude.

Love: Affectionate concern for the well-being of others.

**I hope the thoughts shared in this book has encouraged
you in some small way.**

