



# REFLECTIONS

August 29, 2021

**[Jesus] replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:  
"These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.  
They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are but rules taught by men.'**

*Mark 7:6-7*

## Change of Heart

Sometimes I find myself taking a look at my own life. The wonder of it sometimes smiles back through joyful eyes, sometimes doubt unveils its wrinkled brow, or remorse streams shameful tears, and always a little fear trembles from mysteries that lie ahead. There's much to learn from those mysteries, though. Teachers of life include parents, mentors, friends, and many, many others we didn't even know. But we learn most from living into the mysteries our tomorrows bring. Some of the lessons from them call out our own limitations.

When Jesus says, "*Follow me,*" the choice falls within our direct control. We choose to follow, or we don't. But when Jesus says, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" (John 13:34) or, "*abide in me,*" (15:4) personal efforts alone don't work so well. Those commands look not to self-control, but to the heart—how one *feels* toward something. And when those feelings are not right, a change of heart requires help. Jesus is the helper.

Jesus' commands are not intended to present challenges that can't be met; but they *do* include challenges that can't be met without him. Jesus calls us to be like him. How else can we ever reflect the Light of the world? When Jesus met challenges to face alone, what did he do? So too, shouldn't we turn to the Father?

God has given us control over what we do. We can choose to travel the journey of the world, to go it alone and ignore our feelings, or buy time for emotions to subside a bit; but those won't change the heart. Or we can choose to follow Jesus in our journey through life. He is always with us.

There are simply things we cannot do without help. Change of heart is one of them. But there *is* something required of us alone—

Submission to lean on him.

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# REFLECTIONS

August 22, 2021

**One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.**

*Luke 6:12*

## Keeping in Step

Interesting isn't it that Jesus chose a mountainside as a setting to pray that day. Perhaps unlevel ground was important for some reason, or maybe he found the balance of nature to best represented there. Or maybe Jesus chose the mountainside simply because God called him there. One thing is sure, when Jesus faced important decision, and he needed someone to talk to. God is always a good choice.

For weeks, Jesus had moved about Galilee teaching, healing, and extending invitations to follow him. Many answered his call, "*Follow me,*" until the total had sizably grown. The time then came to choose those for his leadership class—the ones Jesus would call apostles. He would not make his choices lightly. So,

Jesus withdrew into solitude on a mountainside to talk with God—his Father, friend, and maker of heaven and earth. He worshiped him and prayed to him. In his humanity, Jesus listened to him, and *When morning came he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated as apostles.* (Luke 6:13)

It's hard to seek guidance from someone unless you know them well. And to truly know someone requires time to listen to them, to watch them, to see what they see, hear what they hear, and to feel what they feel. It's true whether the counselor is a parent, a friend, or your Creator.

Jesus looked to God the Father for his guidance. And whether on a mountainside, the plain, or on the choppy waters of Galilee, he spent many days and nights with Him, to listen to Him, to watch Him, to see what He sees, hear what He hears, and feel what He feels.

Jesus now has chosen you and me to *go and bear fruit,* (John 15:16) And Paul explained:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* (Galatians 5:22-25)

To keep in step with his Counselor, Jesus spent time with Him, the planner of it all.

To keep in step with Jesus, let's meet him wherever he may call us to be to listen to Him, to watch Him, to see what He sees, hear what He hears, and feel what He feels. Remembering always that Jesus said:

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# REFLECTIONS

August 15, 2021

**He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.**

*Micah 6:8*

## Humility...

Seems like it's something most of us have a hard time with. Don't we compete against each other to prove who is the best? Even when self-esteem runs low, there's usually enough self-worth/ (pride) left over to influence decisions we make. Jesus knows that about us.

Remember when Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*" *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Mark 12:30-31) Why else would he choose "yourself" as the measure for how we are to love our neighbor?

But I also think humility comes hard because it is difficult to understand and accept how big God is—how powerful God is, how perfect He is, how loving and forgiving He is. Since we have never seen God, we can hardly compare ourselves to him as the measure for humility. But when Jesus explained, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*" (John 14:9) And "*I and the Father are one,*" (John 10:30) that is exactly who He established as our standard.

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* (John 13:34 emphasis mine)

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God, we must hold Him always in a higher position than ourselves...

*For the Lord is the great God, / the great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth, / and the mountain peaks belong to him.  
The sea is his, for he made it, / and his hands formed the dry land.  
Come, let us bow down in worship, / let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;  
for he is our God / and we are the people of his pasture, / the flock under his care.  
(Psalms 95:3-7)*

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# REFLECTIONS

August 8, 2021, Refreshed from the Archives of January 31, 2016

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.**

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

## Just Look Back

“What’s next?” we previously asked. Perhaps it’s the question the psalmist pondered when he recognized, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*” (Psalm 119:105) The Lord will show us the way. He always has. Just look back.

What brought you to this place in your life today? The question may not be new, but from time to time an update is in order. Look back at the road just traveled.

Recall the events that shaped the decisions made and the people who influenced your view of the world.

Look at the milestones that marked your way to the place you are standing now.

See how it fits together?

Can you see God’s hand in it all?

It has been said that the Lord may be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path, but he doesn’t reveal the horizon. What’s next remains a mystery. But just look back. God’s hand has led you to this place, and your journey has been preparing you for the plans he has for you.

Trust in the Lord even when you don’t understand what he is doing. Then after a little while, just look back. You may hear God saying:

*“See, I am doing a new thing!*

*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*

*I am making a way in the desert*

*and streams in the wasteland.”* (Isaiah 43:19)

And He has a role in it for you.

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# REFLECTIONS

August 1, 2021, Refreshed from the Archives of January 24, 2016

**That day when evening came, he said to his disciples,  
"Let us go over to the other side."**

*Mark 4:35*

## What's Next?

Who can remember the thoughts racing through our heads as we crossed the stage that night. A milestone had been reached and the high school diplomas in our hands proved it. Emotions must have included a sense of pride, a breath of freedom, and a touch of fear. What's next?

The thought may not have surfaced as we returned to our seats since the ceremony had not reached completion; but soon the question would weigh heavily. What's next? Some of us had plans—college, a job, marriage. But all longed to begin the pursuit of the life dreams formed in the course of those developmental years. Yet along the journey the awakening question would always linger. What's next?

The typical answer back then referenced a way to make a living. Certainly a means of financial support is essential for the pursuit of whatever "next" may be; but the desired outcome for life reaches depths beyond the means of support for it. Still the rewards for jobs taken or professions chosen are easily channeled toward one's personal enjoyment instead of the betterment of the world. Only, life's satisfaction is not found in worldly gain or pleasure however enticing they may seem. The true answer rests deep in the soul.

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life," the saying goes. What's next? The answer begins today. Someone will give direction or make a suggestion just as Jesus did. "*Let us go over to the other side,*" he said to his disciples. And just as they always had, they followed faithfully, without knowing of the life-threatening storm brewing just ahead. They had no idea what would be next, but they had faith in Jesus. So, in faith, they stepped into the boat to follow him.

The disciples must have wondered what's next as Jesus ascended into heaven before their very eyes. Each of them found an answer. Only moments before he had asked them to venture into all the world and make disciples. So in faith they did, *each one [used] whatever gift he [had] received to love and serve others, faithfully administering God's various gifts in its various forms.* (1 Peter 4:10) And they never stopped. In their own way each left a mark on this world that made it a better place. And we can too. So what marks will we leave to make the world a better place?

Well, the answer depends largely on our responses to what's next?

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# REFLECTIONS

July 25, 2021

**"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. "**

*Matthew 6:6 NKJV*

## Your Secret Place

Almighty God will join you there. Remember that when you go into your room to pray. He will be there for you and to listen to you; yet the very thought of his presence may make you so uneasy that your thoughts lean more toward the people who might be listening in. Not your Father.

It happened to Peter, James and John when they found themselves viewing God's kingdom the day Jesus led them up a high mountain. *There [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. And a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

*When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. (Matthew 17:2-3, 5-8)*

So, when you enter your room to pray, don't be afraid. Remember you will be as close to God's kingdom as you will be in this lifetime. Let appeals in your eyes beam from heartfelt love for the Father. Then, *enter His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name saying:*

***Our Father in heaven, / Hallowed be Your name. / Your kingdom come. / Your will be done / On earth as it is in heaven. / Give us this day our daily bread. / And forgive us our debts, / As we forgive our debtors. / And do not lead us into temptation, / But deliver us from the evil one. / For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13 NKJV)***

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# *REFLECTIONS*

July 18, 2021, Refreshed from January 11, 2015

**Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise.**

*1 Corinthians 3:18*

## **An Inside View**

Only moments passed before the neighbor answered the doorbell. My visit there was not unusual but the invitation to come inside was a surprising first. A quick glance inside possibly revealed the reason. The home was not in shambles by any means, but neither was it as orderly as the outside suggested it would be. Dirty dishes sat in the living area, the rug had been soiled by stains unattended, and a broken vase rested on a dusty bookshelf near the fireplace.

Still the welcome was warm and the invitation to make myself comfortable felt genuine; still the neighbor's face expressed alarm from secrets exposed. Outside all appeared orderly, controlled, and even a touch prosperous. The inside view drew a different picture.

What was the truth, I wondered? Who is this person living there? Was the essence of my neighbor portrayed by the outside or did the disarray of the inside represent the truth? My neighbor lives two lives, I judged—a public one that approached perfection; and a private one that exposed a different look.

Then I awakened. It was only a dream. Oh, I rang the doorbell, but it wasn't my neighbor who answered the door. When I looked more closely, I was startled to see before me the image I see in the mirror every day. The décor outside was designed by me. But the inside revealed the state of life I truly live.

Much of life is concealed by secrets and acts of deception. We choose to hide the things that will tarnish the reputation we work so hard to build. In that way we may look no different than the neighbor next door or the person across town. But the inside view reveals the truth of who we really are. It tells the secrets we keep, many of them even from ourselves.

There's nothing new about it nor is it unique to me. The trait dates back to the garden when God saw through the fig leaves into the souls of Adam and Eve. They tried to hide from the wrong they had done. They even laid the blame on someone else. But they only deceived themselves from the truth.

God knows who we are, what we think about, and the motives for all we do. From an inside view of our souls, He sees when we are living to please the world. So maybe we should take a look inside the lives we live and reveal the secrets kept hidden there. It frees us from bondage to the lies we live. And truth gives glory to God.

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# REFLECTIONS

July 11, 2021, Adapted from the Archives of January 18, 2015

**"...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."**

*Luke 12:15*

## Question for Yourself

So, what shall you do today? The morning is fresh. The day is new and so are you. The pursuits of yesterday might be continued with renewed vigor. Or maybe you should try something different; after all, life is an adventure, and we all want to get the most from it. But is "what shall I do today" the only question for yourself? Might you also ask, "why should I do what I choose to do today?"

Jesus told a parable of a rich man who produced a good crop only to realize his storage facilities would not hold its abundance. Only then did he realize he had enough to sustain him for many years. *So, he decided to build more barns than take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.*

*"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.'" (Luke 12:16-21)*

I think God's message reaches deeper than it first sounds. They usually do. I think God wanted to remind the rich man that tomorrow is not promised; and earthly treasures aren't portable into the life beyond. And the rich man needed a reminder to place service to God ahead of serving himself. Everything else is just as Solomon describes, *Meaningless! Meaningless!* Instead, *Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.* (Ecclesiastes 12:8, 13).

All of us need these reminders. We each see the world through different lenses. Each lens is formed by our experiences in the world. They are shaped by what we witness, what we are taught, and what we believe. Together with emotions that form along the way, we identify the objectives of life we choose to pursue. Although we may not be consciously aware of it, we often simply follow a path someone put us on, to be like someone we admire without wondering who God made us to be or why He put us here.

Our wants are comprised of things we do not have, aspirations for achievement, and the resources to attain them. Too often we fail to think deeply enough to truly understand that many of our pursuits chase after those Solomon described to be meaningless

The chase is on for the things we believe will bring happiness. The world persuades us that they are contained in position, power, or possessions. The question left unasked is the one that seeks the real purpose for wanting those things. Once asked, a progression of answers will discover the ultimate desire for eternal joy. Eternal joy comes from living a meaningful life—  
one of love for God and love for our fellow man.

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

*July 4, 2021*

**Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!  
Serve the Lord with gladness;  
Come before His presence with singing.  
Know that the Lord, He is God;  
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;  
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**

**Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,  
And into His courts with praise.  
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.  
For the Lord is good;  
His mercy is everlasting,  
And His truth endures to all generations.**

*Psalms 100 NKJV*

## **God Bless America**

God bless America  
Land that I love  
Stand beside her  
And guide her  
Through the night with a light  
from above  
From the mountains  
To the prairies  
To the oceans white with foam  
God bless America  
My home, sweet home

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# REFLECTIONS

June 27, 2021

**Train a child in the way he should go,  
and when he is old he will not turn from it.**

*Proverbs 22:6*

## Coaching T-Ball

Circumstances not of my choosing once placed me in the position of head coach of a T-Ball team. My assignment, a dozen or so 5- and 6-year-old pre-grade-schoolers who had never played the game before. It proved to be more like herding cats than coaching a baseball team. I knew as much about coaching the age group as I knew about herding cats. I had a lot to learn.

We may not have known much about coaching the age group, but we did know that we were dealing with an age group with short attention spans. So, we focused on keeping them busy above teaching them the game. Besides many of them couldn't throw the ball very well or catch at all; and none of them knew what to do with it if they did.

We divided practice into 10-minute segments where units of two or three players practiced the skills required for the game. During a practice session, every player engaged in learning to throw better, to field and catch, and to hit the ball off the tee. None of them became bored or distracted, and the players surprisingly improved their skills rather rapidly. So, when the season began, our players performed better than any of the other teams. Every game was a runaway win—that is until the head coach left town for a week of vacation.

The wheels came off. Our team lost. I returned to find a totally different atmosphere. The four or five dads who had assisted me from the beginning seemed compatible and capable of handling the team. It never occurred to me to place one of them in charge. Because I didn't, each of those well-meaning coaches instructed the team as he saw fit. But their instructions weren't always compatible, and the players didn't know who to listen to. The second mistake I made wasn't as obvious.

From the confusion brought by conflicting coaching instructions, the coaches' remarks mostly addressed players' mistakes. We began then to encourage our players with suggestions about what to do like, "Throw the ball to first," instead of, "don't throw the ball there." The idea worked.

Our team won the championship game handily. Most notably though, our team made *no* mental errors. The ball wasn't always thrown straight, or caught soundly. But every play was directed to the right place.

The season was a satisfying experience. The players improved with every game, the parents and other coaches had fun watching their sons excel. For me—I learned nothing about herding cats, but I learned other beneficial lessons to *Train a child in the way he should go*:

Develop their talents. Offer encouragement positively. Lead with clarity. And...

***whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*** (Colossians 3:17)

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# REFLECTIONS

June 20, 2021

**See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.**

*Deuteronomy 4:5*

## Be Doers of the Word

When God instructed Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He gave them an understanding of free will and a sense of right and wrong. But to help make it clear, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments to explain sin to the people. But Moses' message to the people didn't end with his explanation:

*Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:6-8; emphasis mine)*

Moses' message asked the people not only to teach the way God wants us to live, but to set examples through our own lives. Then Moses cautioned:

*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." (Deuteronomy 4:9)*

We impart knowledge to our children by what we *tell* them. But we *instill* knowledge in them by *what they see us do*. That is the point James makes in the New Testament:

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:21-25 NKJV)*

Is a person's character rooted in their knowledge? Can children be taught to love without feeling loved? Be doers of the word—

Jesus said, "*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8; emphasis mine)*

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

*June 13, 2021, Updated from January 25, 2009*

**"Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and Love your neighbor as yourself."**

*Matthew 22:37, 39*

## **Insatiable Thirst**

"I thirst," Jesus agonized from the cross. His words were simple, and their meaning clear. Hanging on a cross, spikes driven through his hands and lips parched by the sun, any human would thirst. But Mother Teresa's mind reached deeper.

She worked it overtime during that exhausting train ride. It helped her cope with the incessant click, click, click of the wheels beneath her and the passenger car's relentless sway from unlevelled track. Finally nearing the station, the train slowed to allow her first glimpse of the poverty stricken, and overpopulated place God called her to go. And maybe it was the picture of the people that moved her to hear again, "I thirst." Only this time, she heard them differently.

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**[Jesus] went to [Simon] the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.**

**When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner."**

**Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (Luke 7:36-39, 44-47)**

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Perhaps this story from Luke's Gospel crossed Mother Teresa's mind that day. Certainly, Jesus suffered from thirst on the cross. But his thirst for our love never ceases. That new meaning born into his simple words became her lifelong yearning to love Jesus more. And with each passing day, she did.

Few of us will receive a call to serve in a place like Mother Teresa. But no matter where the path of life takes us, we will find ourselves among people impoverished by an insatiable thirst for love. There, like Mother Teresa, our lives can become a river of Christ's love for those who thirst for it.

And when we shine the light of Jesus' love into the dark world, we also express our heartfelt love for our risen Lord.

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# REFLECTIONS

June 6, 2021

**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

*Matthew 6:20*

## Where Your Treasure Is

Going on a treasure hunt? In this passage, Jesus invites us to go on one. You may be surprised to discover what your treasures are. I was. Sometimes treasures lead us places we never intended to go. At least some of my treasures have.

We're not talking about chess-like pieces that you pray to like I imagine those Rachael took from Laban, her father. You remember the story in Genesis 31 when Jacob broke his bondage to his father-in-law and took his family with him. No. I'm referring to whatever might hold a place in your heart above your love for God.

*Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* (Matthew 22:37-40)

Treasures are those embraceable things at the core of our value systems. They may be in the forms of status, physical possessions, or behavioral practices. They manifest in the heart as your life's priorities. The only way to displace them there is by transplanting something else.

Jesus' summary of the Ten Commandments reminds that love for God should be our greatest treasure. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. So, when you look truthfully into your life—the priorities you assign in your daily living—do you find anything standing between God and your heart? Enter Satan's playground.

Besides threatening our insecurities (food, shelter, and safety,) it seems unlikely that the ole sneaky snake who tempted Eve would choose to tempt you or me with anything that doesn't rank high on our pleasure lists. That's the underbelly Satan likes to attack. He makes sinners of us by blinding us with fear and pleasure. Crafty, huh?

As I said, sometimes our treasures lead us to places we never intended to go. What I didn't say though is knowing what the treasure is may help get us back on track.

Jesus invites us to go on a treasure hunt. He describes what the treasure is and tells us where it should be found. Paul then tells us what the treasure should do:

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Colossians 3:17)

With clues now in hand—Happy hunting.

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# REFLECTIONS

May 30, 2021

**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.**

*Matthew 6:20*

## Next Time

It's curious why I didn't link my own story with his, the one Richard told about spending time with his dying grandmother. "You need to tell people how you feel about them while they're aliiiiive," resonating his deep Mississippi roots. Almost 30 years earlier, I made a decision he intended his warning to discourage.

Back then high school graduation fast approached for the class of '58, and I joined my classmates in anticipation of our jubilant freedom. A dark cloud hovered over me then, only I didn't give it much notice. PaPa's illness seemed likely to pass soon. His doctor's choice to hospitalize him, I assumed, was a choice only for convenience. Even his need for a blood transfusion failed to trigger my alarm about his condition. I was more absorbed in my self-important assignment to drive a local man named A.C. the 70 miles to PaPa's bedside because they shared a blood type. I had no idea such a weighty decision lay ahead.

"I'll see him next time," I said in response to Munna's invitation to see him. I wish I had paid attention to her saddened eyes.

"Next time" didn't come.

How easily it is to take life for granted. PaPa wouldn't see me walk down the aisle at my graduation, complete college, or enter the business world. He never knew that his life modeled the life I set out to live. But worse for me, PaPa departed this world without my expression of love for him I so deeply felt.

Forever unfinished, my bond with my grandfather. I was only 18 back then; but immaturity then offers little relief from the pain of disappointment today. But maturity has taught that every day in this world is God's gift.

The world is beautiful and its variety almost endless. But greater than beauty, God's gift to us comes through people who love us. So it was with PaPa. What a gift. For my life to model his, I pray for God's love to pass through me.

I took life for granted those many years ago. The sting from my decision haunts me still today. "I'll see him next time."

And there wasn't one.

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# REFLECTIONS

May 23, 2021

**This is the day the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

*Psalms 118:24*

## Beautiful Mornings

Sounds like the overture from *Oklahoma*. “Oh, what a beautiful morning!” It’s true on many days—but not every day. If mornings were all beautiful, we would scarcely notice. Maybe that’s God’s reason that they’re not.

Back home, before the breeze awakens busy sounds of the day, crisp air sharpens an orange glow crawling up the horizon toward morning’s bloom. Funny though, in that arid sandy land I once called home, I didn’t notice them much until I moved away. Only then could I appreciate how much I missed them. But God colors beautiful mornings in other places too.

Those northwest Texas mornings liken their breeze and sandy terrain to seashore settings. There, the roar of incessant waves adds a rhythmic beat to nature’s symphonic score; and mornings yawn and stretch to awaken a glimmer of orange hovering just below the horizon. It inches itself upward, slowly blends the brightening sky with oceans’ blue, and gives birth to another beautiful morning.

Far to the east, Israel’s morning sun crept over the hills of the Decapolis. Its golden image reflected off *Galilee’s* glassy sea. Winds there held their breath waiting to scatter white suds across the sea’s velvet blue. Oh, what a beautiful morning!

Sometimes we need to take leave from our busy lives to commune with God’s morning symphony. He writes the score and plays it every day if we pause to listen. The majesty of Eden is hidden there. God’s footprints stand on the podium, and through the darkness—

The Light of the world makes a beautiful morning into a joyful day.

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# REFLECTIONS

May 16, 2021

**...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.**

*Romans 5:1-2*

## Back Home

Back home—sometimes memories draw me to the place I grew up. Today fond memories show me how blessed my life has been. I don't remember any other kind. I always felt love back home even in those occasional spankings when I misbehaved. And our daily routines there felt so natural. Each day Mom tailored breakfast to my tastes as they changed from time to time. We had dinner at noon and supper in the evening. Daddy wasn't a breakfast eater, but for other meals the four of us were always together. I never imagined any other patterns of home before those sleepovers in the homes of my childhood friends.

Patterns were a bit different there. In our small country town, it was convenient for dads who worked in town to come home at noon; so, the dinner-supper pattern didn't vary much from home to home. Daddy even found time for a quick nap before heading back to work. I did find differences in other practices though. The atmosphere of each home felt different—not bad, just different; baths were different, bedtime different, and meals were different. In one home I remember, it mattered whether the sandwiches were dressed with Kraft mayonnaise, and not salad dressing. But I don't remember any of those homes without the presence of Jesus' love. I think that reveals part of my blessed life too.

Home life in those early years shaped my view of how life is supposed to be. Hope is in it. And the similarities with the home lives of my childhood friends helps explain the closeness of our friendships these many years later. Still, home life differences, however small, shaped the differences in the homes we later formed for ourselves. But here's the point.

Just as our lives were influenced by our childhood experiences, the home life we provide our children and our children's children shapes the way they will view the world. And they will shape lives that follow them.

Someday when our children and grandchildren remember *their* days back home, I pray they will see God's blessing there; and they will *have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into his grace in which we now stand. And [they will] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Wouldn't that be a satisfying legacy to leave in the world.

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# *REFLECTIONS*

May 9, 2021

**Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.**

*Deuteronomy 4:9*

## **Lessons Honored**

We resist it every day, that bit of change that happens. We become attached to and seek to protect “the good ole days” while acting paradoxically to mark those very days with something new, different, and better.

It would be a dull world without change, and maybe that is God’s reason for it and for including us in the effort. Still, some things must be preserved.

History of course doesn’t change, but lessons from it can be lost. Teach the events of the past to your children, but especially the lessons from them. History captures events in the context of traditions and circumstances surrounding them. But it’s the lessons from them that benefit the life choices that lay ahead.

Telling alone doesn’t teach. Knowledge of something benefits nothing unless it is practiced in the flow of life. Unpracticed knowledge is no more than theory and analysis viewed from a distance.

Mother’s Day is a tradition to honor—not only to express love to Mom, but also to add to memories of those earlier days you still hold dear. When we fail to honor our traditions not only are they lost, but the values taught by them perish too. And that’s the point Moses makes in the challenge delivered to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:9.

So parents, live the lessons with your children and with their children after them. The values taught from the past rest in the lessons you honor.

And children, pay attention to those lessons. Use them to guide you through your journey through this world. Over time, those good ole’ days may still change a bit, but when it’s your turn to lead *your* children, follow the lessons honored by your past, remembering:

*When you teach your children, you teach your children’s children.*

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# REFLECTIONS

May 2, 2021

**"For God so loved the world..."**

*John 3:16*

## Prodigal Son—Another Lesson

We know Jesus' parable, told by Luke with its many life lessons. A son, probably adolescent, foolishly asks his father for his inheritance—now! The father complies even in the face of the son's rejection. The son leaves home presuming, we guess, that the inheritance in hand will never run dry. He learns differently. When he finds himself wallowing in hog slop, the son makes his way back home seeking no more than regular meals and a place to sleep. Surprisingly though, his father greets him with open arms—no scolding, no punishment, not even an "I told you so"—but with greater love than the son has ever known.

But there is another lesson not often told. This one portrays God's plan for our salvation. The son plays the sinful world, the father, the triune God, creator of all things. **In it...**

**[God makes] known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.** (Ephesians 1:9-10)

**[Christ] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. (Acts 3:21) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)**

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.** (Colossians 1:15-20)

**God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. / We love because he first loved us.** (1 John 4:16-20, underscore mine)

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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)

**For God so loved the world...**

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# *REFLECTIONS*

April 25, 2021

**"But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,  
or let the fish of the sea inform you.  
Which of all these does not know  
that the hand of the Lord has done this?"**

*Job 12:7-9*

## **Provident Care**

Have you ever seen God's hand in your life? Or heard his voice, or felt his touch? In answer, a friend's response said everything, "Just look around."

My friend saw the Master Painter's artistry everywhere. He heard God's voice when breeze rustled through the trees, when thunder rumbled from the clouds, and when ocean waves splashed on sandy shores. And he felt God's touch through every fragment of the world, so elegantly yet mysteriously linked to form the whole.

Psalmists describe God's provident care:

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; / it flows between the mountains. / They give water to all the beasts of the field; / the wild donkeys quench their thirst. / The birds of the air nest by the waters; / they sing among the branches. / He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; / the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. / He makes grass grow for the cattle, / and plants for man to cultivate — bringing forth food from the earth: / wine that gladdens the heart of man, / oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. / The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. / There the birds make their nests; / the stork has its home in the pine trees. / The high mountains belong to the wild goats; / the crags are a refuge for the conies. (Psalms 104:10-18)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, / burst into jubilant song with music; / make music to the Lord with the harp, / with the harp and the sound of singing, / with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn — shout for joy before the Lord, the King. (Psalms 98:4-6)

I will sing to the Lord all my life; / I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. / May my meditation be pleasing to him, / as I rejoice in the Lord. (Psalms 104:33-34)

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# REFLECTIONS

April 18, 2021

**"... [the kingdom of God is like] ... a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."**

*Mark 4:31-32*

## Mustard Seed

**In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. **Through him all things were made**; without him nothing was made that has been made. **In him was life, and that life was the light of men**. (John 1:1-4, emphasis mine) Jesus was God's instrument for the creation and to give the light of life to mankind.

**"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** (John 15:5 emphasis mine) Even as a tiny branch of the vine, God gives each of us our own kingdoms that reach the outer limits of our influence.

**"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..."** (Genesis 3:5) Our kingdoms don't give us royalty with standing in our spheres of influence. Yet too often we strive to shape our respective kingdoms into places we seek for ourselves. Isn't that what the serpent convinced Eve to do when she ate the forbidden fruit? Still...

**Christ is all, and is in all.** (Colossians 3:11) This *is* our Father's world, and we are among His instruments placed here to grow *his* kingdom. In us, something as small as a mustard seed, God placed Christ in you and in me to grow *His* kingdom.

The dearest thing to us in our kingdoms is most often our own home and family. But our influence reaches through our neighborhoods, workplaces, social connections, recreational settings, and to other places untold. People watch what we do, hear what we say, and sense what we feel. When they find Christ in *our* lives, it influences theirs. So...

**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts**, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:15-16)

**And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** (Colossians 3:17)

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# REFLECTIONS

April 11, 2021

**"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"**

*John 6:9*

## Small Things

That night at McDonald Observatory, the vastness of the star-filled sky made me feel small. Never had I felt less important. I felt no larger than the smallest of the tiny twinkling lights above. It's hard to feel relevant amid such a setting. It's easy to say God's time is not our time and his ways are not our ways; but it's not so easily grasped until you see yourself in the fullness of His great creation. How can something as small as your lives and mine make much difference to His infinite kingdom?

Since the beginning, more and more small things have been revealed to mankind. Discovery of microorganisms added to mankind's understanding of the science of life. Small acts of kindness, compassion, and love awaken us to the power of them on our daily lives. Small things are as important to God's creation as air, water, and food are to human life. God made small things. God does great things through small things.

Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a small thing: **"[It] is like a mustard seed, which is the *smallest seed* you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."** (Mark 4:31)

Jesus fed 5,000 men with only five loaves and two *small* fish. (John 6:8-9) And He watched as a poor widow put in two *very small* copper coins. **"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."** (Luke 21:3-4)

**God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.** (1 Corinthians 1:27—29)

Now look at ourselves: small among billions alive today; minuscule compared to the untold numbers who lived before; and off the radar when numbered among those who are yet to pass through this world in the course of time. Yet, no matter how small or insignificant we may feel in the vastness of God's creation, He made each of us for a reason too. God uses small things to make a difference.

He made you and me to be among them.

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# REFLECTIONS

April 4, 2021 Refreshed from April 12, 2020

**Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

*1 Corinthians 15:57*

## Victory

For more than a thousand days they followed him. Now with Jesus gone, the disciples huddled in the upper room without him. Two nights and one lonely day passed in fear of being next. Sunday morning promised to be another. Then Mary burst through the door.

Mary Magdalen slept little since her Lord's death. Jesus filled every thought. She wanted—no, she *needed* him! Mary hurried through the morning darkness to his tomb to be with him. Whatever her expectations might have been when she arrived, she didn't expect what she found.

"He is not here," the angel said. "He has risen!" Stunned yet elated by the news, Mary ran to find the disciples; then bursting through the door, she gasped, "He has risen! He has risen!" John and Peter in doubt raced to see for themselves. The empty tomb said it all.

**He has risen! He has risen indeed!**

Heavenly Father, your Light shines so brightly this Easter Sunday. Today air smells fresher, hope feels greater, and your love most clearly revealed. It is your day, loving God. It is the day we remember who you are and what you did for us. On this day you conquered death.

Every day we seem to live as if you were not there. Every day we fail to follow your commands. We fail to love others as ourselves; and we fail to love you above all else. Yet you so *loved us that you gave your only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Today we come to you in celebration of the time you walked with us in this world, when you suffered humiliation, pain, and a tortuous death all because of your love for us. Today, "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*"

*"Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?"* (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

This Easter day we celebrate victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We give thanks to you today, Loving God, for this indescribable gift!

Amen

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# REFLECTIONS

April 1, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Epilogue

*On the other side of Kidron Valley, there is an olive grove [called Gethsemane.] (John 18:1) On the way up the Mt. of Olives, Jesus led his disciples there. He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Matthew 26: 36-38)*

*He said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,<sup>1</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

*When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*

*While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him:*

*"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:40-48)*

\*\*\*\*\*

*When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.*

*But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.*

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — when darkness reigns."*

*Then seizing him, they led him away... (Luke 22:49-54)*

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<sup>1</sup> Today, on the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane, the Basilica of the Agony enshrines a portion of bedrock believed to be the place where Jesus prayed that night alone in the garden.

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# REFLECTIONS

March 31, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Part Two

The other disciples gave little notice when Judas departed from them. He had been the money keeper; and they assumed Jesus sent him to purchase something for the meal or to give something to the poor.

With Judas gone, *Jesus said / "My children, I will be with you only a little longer... [and] Where I am going, you cannot come." Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." / Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!* (John 13:33, 37-38)

*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.* (Luke 22:14)

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." / Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. / "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."* (Mark 14:22-25)

*Then, Jesus looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* (John 17:1, 4-5)

*"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world... Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. / As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* (John 17:6-7, 18-19)

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17:20-21, 23)

*When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley...* (John 18:1)

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Passover Lamb—This is my body and my blood.

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# REFLECTIONS

March 28, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Part One

Peter and John saw a man carrying a jar of water and just as Jesus told them to, they followed him to a place with a spacious upper room—perfect for a Passover celebration. Love filled the room that evening. Around the Passover feast, Jesus washed the disciples' feet; predicted his death, whispered into his traitor's ear; prayed for himself, his disciples, and for you and me. Then, with his disciples, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley to face the worst.

*The evening meal was being served, [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. [Then,] he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" / Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." / "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." / Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (John 13:2, 4-8)*

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place... Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (John 13:12, 14-16)*

\*\*\*\*\*

(Jesus loved his disciples as one loves their children, and as a servant humbly serves his master. He cleansed their feet with water the same as He would come to cleanse their spirits and souls with the sacrifice of his body and blood. Not because they were worthy, but even if they weren't. Nothing was required to receive it—only to believe. So, it makes me wonder if Jesus had this scene in mind when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another, as I have loved you, love one another." Love, not because they're worthy, but even if they're not.)

\*\*\*\*\*

*Then, Jesus faced his disciples with a troubled spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." Then, dipping a piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.*

*Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly," ... (John 13:21, 26-27)*

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# REFLECTIONS

March 21, 2021

**"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

*Matthew 6:19-21*

## Judas' Footsteps

Sitting in the temple with His disciples lined up beside him, Jesus watched *the rich put their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* (Luke 21:1-4)

While Jesus watched the impoverished widow give all she had to God, Judas saw it too. I wonder what might have passed through his mind from what he saw, and what he heard? The poor widow gave everything she had to God. Possessed by Satan, Judas was readying to sellout the Lamb of God for the value of a slave.

Jesus selected each of his disciples. Judas was no exception. Other than his father's name, Simon, we know little of his background. But we do know that Judas' footsteps followed Jesus wherever He went throughout his public ministry. Judas heard the sermons preached from the hillsides, and the lessons taught through parables. Judas watched miracles unfold, and he was among the twelve disciples sent to preach a message to *"the lost sheep of Israel."* And during his time with Jesus, Judas surely felt the warmth and depth of Jesus' love. Yet, the lure of earthly treasures proved stronger than his commitment to Jesus or God the Father.

But before we cluck our tongues, let's remember the would-be follower who wanted *first* to bury his father (Luke 9:59-60;) and the rich young man who walked away from Jesus rather than let go of his position in life (Matthew 19:16-22). And let's not forget, Peter denied Jesus three times.

So today, I ask myself, what might I be choosing to hold on to that Jesus is asking me to leave behind? Jesus sacrificed his life so I may live forever beyond this world even as I cling to earthly things that will not endure. That choice follows in Judas' footsteps, not Jesus'.

*"Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe,"* the hymn's lyrics go.

So, should I betray Jesus for whatever the earthly treasures may be?

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# REFLECTIONS

March 14, 2021

**Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,  
"Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"  
"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the  
stones will cry out."**

*Luke 19:39-40*

## Stories from the Golden Gate

Peering across the Kidron Valley from the summit of the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem's Golden Gate grabbed center stage. Jerusalem's eastern wall housed its shell. Sealed in 1511 A.D., an outline of the Golden Gate still marks the place of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem astride a donkey and to cries of Hosanna! Hosanna! I wondered what it felt like to be in the crowd; and I wondered if the Gate could talk, what stories would it have to tell.

Across from my place atop the Mount of Olives, the frame of the Golden Gate faced me. Its outline cast a proud smile for the opportunity to greet Jesus into the City. The choice of entry likely related to its proximity to the Temple. I pondered the stories of Jesus' entries through it; and I wondered if a personified gate might have its own views of those stories to share with me.

I wondered what the Gate might have seen when Jesus sent two disciples into the City in search of a donkey. I pondered what a personified gate might wonder about the people standing there asking the disciples *"What are you doing, untying that colt?"* And the people allowing them to take the donkey after a brief explanation. (Mark 11:5)

I wondered how the gate might have felt watching Jesus descend the Mount of Olives on the donkey to cries of *"Hosanna!"* / *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"* (Mark 11:9, 11) And for the whole city to be stirred to ask, *"Who is this?"* when Jesus entered Jerusalem the next day followed by the crowds' reply, *"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

Would the gate express surprise by *Jesus' entry into the temple area [driving] out all who were buying and selling there; [and] to overturn the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"* (Matthew 21:12-13)

And how touching might it have been to watch Jesus observe *the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. And then also to watch a poor widow put in two very small copper coins, and hear Jesus explain, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* (Luke 21:1-4)

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# REFLECTIONS

March 7, 2021

**"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' "**

*John 1:29-31*

## John the Baptist's Message

The crowd along the Jordan Riverbanks gathered to hear John the Baptist's message of repentance and cleansing baptism. And I wonder what they thought when John called their attention to another person in the crowd. "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" I wonder how many of them realized what John was talking about?

Even before John's birth, he knew about Jesus. Remember how Mary hurried to Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth, her relative also with child. And Elizabeth said, "*As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*" (Luke 1:44) Zechariah and Elizabeth's baby became known as John the Baptist, and the one chosen by God to introduce Jesus to the world.

God prepared John the Baptist for his role, but his audience that day likely wondered what he was talking about when he referred to Jesus as the *Lamb of God*. Would it dawn on them that God sent Jesus into the world as God's own sacrifice for the sins of all who believed in him? But John the Baptist knew.

A quality commonly identified with good leaders is that they ask nothing of their subjects they, themselves, would not do. And *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16 KJV)

Ever hear an announcement with significance you didn't fully grasp until you looked back on its happening? Even with John the Baptist's further explanation: "*This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.*" His words likely hung in mystery with the gathering on the Jordan Riverbanks that day. Then, on Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, Peter finalized John's message:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.* (Acts 2:38-39, 41)

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

February 28, 2021

**For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,**

*Psalms 139:13-14*

## **Marvelously Made**

People, people, people everywhere—as many as the stars. I am but one insignificant face blended among them.

Many times through the years, these *Reflections* have referenced Psalm 139:14: *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*. Eugene Peterson paraphrased the verse in *The Message*, “...*I am marvelously made*.” Descriptive terms like splendid, strikingly beautiful, sumptuous in structure and adornment, and impressive in mind or spirit simply don’t connect with the reflection I see in the mirror each day. But God says they do. And Webster uses all those terms to define the word Peterson chose.

If these *Reflections* have an underlying theme, it’s that our lives matter to God. He has a purpose for them, and He made you and me just as we need to be to fulfill it. He carefully chose our parents, our birthplaces, and the days to walk through this world; and He directed the paths through unique circumstances that define each of our lives.

Remember, God pulled an 80-year-old named Moses from a shepherd’s field to lead his people from slavery. He selected Esther to be queen for a time when God’s chosen people faced serious trouble. He picked an ordinary teenage virgin to give birth to his only Son; and God chose a man born blind, “*so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*.” (John 9:3)

No matter the image we see in the mirror, we are marvelously made. Don’t forget, Jesus *had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* (Isaiah 53:2-3)

God formed us in our mothers’ wombs. He gave us influence to shape lives around us the same way others shaped ours. And when the responsibility feels too great, God covered that too:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart / and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him, / and he will direct your paths.* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

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# REFLECTIONS

February 21, 2021

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness," God he created him; male and female he created them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.**

*Genesis 1:26-27, 31*

## Good Ole Days

From time to time, something draws our minds back to those good ole days. Of course, the good ole days break down into our own generations of days gone by. But whatever the generation, there is just something special about our lives that we long to carry on.

Imagine Adam and Eve recalling the good ole days where *streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. The Lord God had planted a garden there, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* (Genesis 2:6, 8-9)

Eden—the only period when the good ole days perfectly fits the term. What a gift! In love, God provided a residential paradise. Who could want more? Yet they did. The residents disobeyed and took God's gift granted. *So the Lord God banished [them] from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.* (Genesis 3:23-24)

Hard times carry our minds back to our good ole days—back to something precious then that's missing now. What makes those good ole days special isn't a time or place. What makes the good ole days special to us is God's love graciously given that we gratefully receive. But to carry it on, God instructed Moses to say:

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.* (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

*God so loved the world that He gave...* Too often though we fail to give back. And might that just be the precious something from the good ole days that's missing now?

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"* (Luke 10:27) And train our children to love him too. (Prov 22:6)

Oh! And one more thing. The acronym of Good Ole Days spells G.O.D.

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

February 14, 2021

**All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.**

*Acts 2:44-45*

## **Swings, Slides, and See-Saws**

Whether real or imagined, faint memories of entering the first grade still stir fear-mixed excitement. Among familiar faces melded with many I'd never seen before, I passed through the school door into a new adventure.

For four enchanting years Alamo School became like a second home. Children I knew joined those I didn't to fill my classroom, the lunchroom, and the playground with new friends. We learned the "Three Rs" together there. And we learned about each other.

When I remember the playground today, I recall the recess bell setting off footraces for the swings, slides, and see-saws on a playground spacious enough to run freely and play other games. I believe that playground is where character was both developed and revealed. And on that playground, we began to learn how to manage our differences.

The swings attracted those with delight in the thrill of heights and the rush of air from speeding back and forth. There were those neighboring swings, but except for an occasional helpful push, there was little interaction with them. Swings seemed to fit those who found satisfaction in being alone and doing their own thing.

Slides provided a similar thrill, but sometimes while waiting in line for their turn, or when someone helped them after a landing went wrong, there were more opportunities for interaction with others.

Unlike swings and slides, see-saws require two people—two collaborative people. Each person alternates having both feet on the ground. When they thrust themselves up from that control position, control transfers to the other party on whom they then depend to return the favor. See-saw partners exercise trust as they alternate the positions of power and vulnerability. It requires the see-saw partners to: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considers others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* (Philippians 2:3-4)

Is a lesson there somewhere?

For a short time, that's what the early church did.

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# REFLECTIONS

February 7, 2021

**For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;**

*Psalms 139:13-14*

## Vocare—To Call

Buried somewhere in storage lays a scrapbook of my high school days. Besides a few small medals and mementoes noting a handful of achievements, there isn't much of importance there. Napkins from banquets I don't otherwise remember, photos from our Senior trip, and articles about the best football team our school ever had fill most of the pages. (I wasn't on it.) But one page is dedicated to a newspaper photo unrelated to those days. The photo captures only the sky and a few clouds. It is notable because the photographer captured an instant in time when clouds formed an unmistakable image of Jesus.

Think about it. A cloud-formed image sketched across the sky so one might imagine a voice from heaven say, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17) Or maybe in the wonder of that photo hearing Jesus say, "*Follow me.*"

Looking back today at the path my life has taken, I believe Jesus must have led me down it. I see now the many stops and turns we made along the way, the institutions that taught me, the jobs that fed me, the bosses who trained me, and the people and happenings that introduced me to life's realities. And they all finally led me to the place where I could see for the first time how fully my travels prepared me for my calling—*vocare*.

Frederick Buechner explained *vocare*, "[as] the place where your deep gladness and the world's great hunger meet."<sup>2</sup> Or like the composers wrote, I found "The Wind Beneath My Wings." *Reflections* dated March 26, 2006 describes the wind as "the passion of your heart and that's what makes you fly." So, when I discovered how God intended my giftedness to serve Him in my work *and* in my personal life, I found my calling. Then like Dorothy searching for home in the *Wizard of Oz*, I discovered I had been there all along.

Now, about adding the photo of a cloud-sketched Jesus to my scrapbook, I don't recall my thoughts then. But I believe I saved it because I felt Jesus calling *me*. Then unknowingly, I followed him down the path to the *vocation* God planned for me before the world began.

So, if you're wondering now why I felt called to tell you my story. It's not because it's my story. It's because Buechner said if I tell it right, you may find in it a bit of your story too.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*, New York: Seabury, 1969; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*, San Francisco; Harper & Row, 1991

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# REFLECTIONS

January 24, 2021

**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and  
with all your soul and with all your strength.**

*Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

## The Shema

Moses delivered it. Jesus affirmed it. An early church lived it—at least for a while.

The Shema summarized God's expectation for mankind. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Jesus affirmed it. *"The most important [command,]"* answered Jesus, *"is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" He added: "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:29-31)

On Pentecost Peter warned and pleaded with the people, *"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:40-47)

The Shema, is there a better example? They placed God first; and loved their neighbor. But can anyone live their entire life that way? Jesus didn't remove the Shema. He affirmed it.

So, here we are: *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7:18, 20, 24)

John explained, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us".* (1 John 4:10-12)

*Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:25) We are forgiven!

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# REFLECTIONS

January 31, 2021

**In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned**

*Titus 2:7-8*

## Show and Tell

Imagine yourself left alone by your mentor with an assignment you feel ill prepared to perform. Then, grasping for help, you rip open a letter from him that reads:

*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished...* and he follows with a long list of things you must teach. (Titus 1:5-9)

“But I’m no teacher!” you cry. Only you are! We all are.

God built into us a heart that beats, lungs that breathe, a brain that thinks and senses to guide us toward preservation. And we don’t need to do much to make them work. But for most other needs we need a teacher—and we are tapped for the job. *Train a child in the way he should go*, the proverb reads. And that’s only for starters.

Some form of the word *teach*, appears about 400 times in the NIV Bible. And when the various synonyms like *train* and *instruct* are added, the tally reaches well over 500. And those words don’t include teaching methods like write, preach, and explain. Nor does the count include perhaps the most important of all—*show*.

*Show me your ways, O Lord, / teach me your paths* (Psalms 25:4) ... *you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.* (Hebrews 5:12) It’s Show and Tell.

We are all called to teach, but it may be all for naught unless we also show it too.

Each of us teach life lessons to the many whose paths we cross in our lifetimes. Behavior reveals both the principles we hold dear and the temptations that draw us from them. And the balance between the good and evil practices we display will define the legacy we leave in this world. The enduring lessons we teach are not from the words we speak or directions we give. Enduring lessons come from the teachings we live.

*Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.* (Exodus 18:20) Jesus did.

*Jesus went [about,] teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.* (Matthew 4:23-24)

*"The most important [command] is this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:29-31)

Because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, Jesus chose obedience. (John 3:16) And because Jesus loved us, he chose the cross.

Show and Tell. It’s the lesson Jesus showed us. And what Paul asked Titus to do.

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

January 17, 2021

**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself  
through Christ and gave us the ministry of  
reconciliation...**

*2 Corinthians 5:18*

## **Ministers of Reconciliation**

Paul, or Saul of Tarsus as he was first known, has been referenced in many of these *Reflections*. As a dedicated and highly educated Pharisee, he first purposed his life to protect and defend God's law as his teachers had taught. His purpose may have been well intended, but his actions often maligned it instead. *Love your neighbor as yourself* is central both to the Law of Moses and Jesus' teachings; but Saul's actions exemplified neither.

His horrific attacks on a movement of Jesus' followers called the Way built a terrorist's reputation. The reputation preceded his travels wherever he went, and repudiated Jesus' command to *love your enemies*.

One can speculate why Jesus chose to encounter Paul on the Damascus road. Jesus may have been attracted to Paul's competitive nature as suggested by his references to the importance of training and perseverance to athletic performance. Or maybe Paul's persuasive writing and speech made him a prime candidate for the job Jesus had in mind for him. Or Jesus may have wanted you and me to see how God uses sinners to server his purposes. But whatever the reason for Jesus' choice, Paul had a reputation to address before he could effectively do the job.

Words may be inspirational, and wisdom may turn heads, but no matter their allure, wisdom and words fall unheeded unless the speaker is also known to live them. So, Paul's reputation needed repair.

God uses wilderness experiences to produce a state of brokenness. Brokenness is the condition when one is unable to help themselves *and* is willing admit it. Examples include Joseph's years of separation from his family to develop his leadership skills; Daniel's months in captivity to formulate his prophecies; and John the Baptist and Apostle Paul had years in the wilderness to prepare their messages. But at least as important, to prepare to live them out.

God reconciled all of these to himself through Christ and gave them roles in the ministry of reconciliation.

Now today, doesn't it seem like a good time for Jesus to place such a call to you and me?

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# REFLECTIONS

January 10, 2021

**My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted  
hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name  
together.**

*Psalms 34:2-3*

## Seasons of Trouble

He might have thrown back his shoulders and taken credit for his immense power and vast land and livestock holdings. He could have shown pride in his good health, loving wife, ten fun loving children, and servants enough for every need. But he didn't. Instead, Job looked at himself as a man blessed by God; and he never once removed his eyes from the source of it all. Still, he couldn't see the storm brewing until... Poof!

It was gone—all of it! His servants slain by the sword, his ten children crushed in a storm, livestock slaughtered or stolen. Disgust even replaced his wife's love.

Job's story is among the most difficult to read in all the Bible. But as tough it may be to read; it must have been excruciating to live. And God allowed it. Yet, even in his seasons of trouble, Job reasoned, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; /Blessed be the name of the Lord."* (1:21 NJKV) And Job accepted, *"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* (2:10)

Seasons of trouble blow through everyone's life. Should we expect otherwise? Jesus warned, *"In this world you will have trouble."* (John 16:33) And to the Romans, Paul wrote:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* (8:16-17)

Peter said it this way: *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* (1 Peter 2:21)

Job stood strong, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, /and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. / And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;"* (19:25-26)

David too, *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; /he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."* (34:4-5) And

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, /And saves those who are crushed in spirit. /Many are the afflictions of the righteous; /But the Lord delivers him out of them all.* (34:18-19 NASB)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a [huge crowd] of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* (Hebrews 12:1-3)

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# REFLECTIONS

January 3, 2021

**Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

## Broken

Give thanks for the pandemic of 2020? And give thanks to God for allowing COVID-19 to change life as we have known it by causing death of so many, and placing the world in a broken state? It feels unnatural to give thanks for such brokenness.

One might agree that the word 'broken' describes the state of the world today. But it's not the first time for it. The world first fell into brokenness when a sneaky snake convinced Eve and Adam to eat fruit from a forbidden tree. Broken. Then, to get their attention, God expelled the world's first couple from the perfect home He had made for them.

Soon, mankind strayed again. Broken. God responded with a great flood. Then finding the Israelites broken in Egypt, God, through Moses, led the enslaved people to the promised land only to have them faithlessly refuse to enter it. Broken. And on and on the stories go—mankind drifting from God into brokenness and God restoring them once they turned to him for help again. Likely, events leading up to today will also make history—broken.

Broken is the state when one is unable to help themselves, *and*, willing admit it. Maybe that's the reason Paul told us to *give thanks in all circumstances*, great and small, good things and bad. When all our efforts fail, and there are no other places to turn, only then do we turn to God for help. Paul did and he learned: "*I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2 Corinthians 12:10)

God warned us not to forget: *When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you — a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant — then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD...* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

*So, dear God, we turn to you today. The world is broken and we, your children, are to blame. We try to fix it ourselves because of pride that wants to prove we don't need you; that we are as powerful as you. Some choose to believe you don't exist at all. But our efforts seem only to aggravate it more. And throughout all the years from that beautiful beginning, only our brokenness lifts our heads to you. Today gracious LORD, we raise our arms and lift our faces to you.*

*And we discover then that reaching solely to you is all you have asked of us all along.  
Amen*

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# REFLECTIONS

April 18, 2021

**"... [the kingdom of God is like] ... a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."**

*Mark 4:31-32*

## Mustard Seed

**In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. **Through him all things were made**; without him nothing was made that has been made. **In him was life, and that life was the light of men**. (John 1:1-4, emphasis mine) Jesus was God's instrument for the creation and to give the light of life to mankind.

**"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** (John 15:5 emphasis mine) Even as a tiny branch of the vine, God gives each of us our own kingdoms that reach the outer limits of our influence.

**"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..."** (Genesis 3:5) Our kingdoms don't give us royalty with standing in our spheres of influence. Yet too often we strive to shape our respective kingdoms into places we seek for ourselves. Isn't that what the serpent convinced Eve to do when she ate the forbidden fruit? Still...

**Christ is all, and is in all.** (Colossians 3:11) This *is* our Father's world, and we are among His instruments placed here to grow *his* kingdom. In us, something as small as a mustard seed, God placed Christ in you and in me to grow *His* kingdom.

The dearest thing to us in our kingdoms is most often our own home and family. But our influence reaches through our neighborhoods, workplaces, social connections, recreational settings, and to other places untold. People watch what we do, hear what we say, and sense what we feel. When they find Christ in *our* lives, it influences theirs. So...

**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts**, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:15-16)

**And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** (Colossians 3:17)

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# REFLECTIONS

April 11, 2021

**"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"**

*John 6:9*

## Small Things

That night at McDonald Observatory, the vastness of the star-filled sky made me feel small. Never had I felt less important. I felt no larger than the smallest of the tiny twinkling lights above. It's hard to feel relevant amid such a setting. It's easy to say God's time is not our time and his ways are not our ways; but it's not so easily grasped until you see yourself in the fullness of His great creation. How can something as small as your lives and mine make much difference to His infinite kingdom?

Since the beginning, more and more small things have been revealed to mankind. Discovery of microorganisms added to mankind's understanding of the science of life. Small acts of kindness, compassion, and love awaken us to the power of them on our daily lives. Small things are as important to God's creation as air, water, and food are to human life. God made small things. God does great things through small things.

Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a small thing: **"[It] is like a mustard seed, which is the *smallest seed* you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."** (Mark 4:31)

Jesus fed 5,000 men with only five loaves and two *small* fish. (John 6:8-9) And He watched as a poor widow put in two *very small* copper coins. **"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."** (Luke 21:3-4)

**God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.** (1 Corinthians 1:27—29)

Now look at ourselves: small among billions alive today; minuscule compared to the untold numbers who lived before; and off the radar when numbered among those who are yet to pass through this world in the course of time. Yet, no matter how small or insignificant we may feel in the vastness of God's creation, He made each of us for a reason too. God uses small things to make a difference.

He made you and me to be among them.

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# REFLECTIONS

April 4, 2021 Refreshed from April 12, 2020

**Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

*1 Corinthians 15:57*

## Victory

For more than a thousand days they followed him. Now with Jesus gone, the disciples huddled in the upper room without him. Two nights and one lonely day passed in fear of being next. Sunday morning promised to be another. Then Mary burst through the door.

Mary Magdalen slept little since her Lord's death. Jesus filled every thought. She wanted—no, she *needed* him! Mary hurried through the morning darkness to his tomb to be with him. Whatever her expectations might have been when she arrived, she didn't expect what she found.

"He is not here," the angel said. "He has risen!" Stunned yet elated by the news, Mary ran to find the disciples; then bursting through the door, she gasped, "He has risen! He has risen!" John and Peter in doubt raced to see for themselves. The empty tomb said it all.

**He has risen! He has risen indeed!**

Heavenly Father, your Light shines so brightly this Easter Sunday. Today air smells fresher, hope feels greater, and your love most clearly revealed. It is your day, loving God. It is the day we remember who you are and what you did for us. On this day you conquered death.

Every day we seem to live as if you were not there. Every day we fail to follow your commands. We fail to love others as ourselves; and we fail to love you above all else. Yet you so *loved us that you gave your only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Today we come to you in celebration of the time you walked with us in this world, when you suffered humiliation, pain, and a tortuous death all because of your love for us. Today, "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*"

*"Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?"* (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

This Easter day we celebrate victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*We give thanks to you today, Loving God, for this indescribable gift!*

Amen

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# REFLECTIONS

April 1, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Epilogue

*On the other side of Kidron Valley, there is an olive grove [called Gethsemane.] (John 18:1) On the way up the Mt. of Olives, Jesus led his disciples there. He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Matthew 26: 36-38)*

*He said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,<sup>4</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

*When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*

*While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him:*

*"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:40-48)*

\*\*\*\*\*

*When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.*

*But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.*

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — when darkness reigns."*

*Then seizing him, they led him away... (Luke 22:49-54)*

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<sup>4</sup> Today, on the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane, the Basilica of the Agony enshrines a portion of bedrock believed to be the place where Jesus prayed that night alone in the garden.

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# REFLECTIONS

March 31, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Part Two

The other disciples gave little notice when Judas departed from them. He had been the money keeper; and they assumed Jesus sent him to purchase something for the meal or to give something to the poor.

With Judas gone, *Jesus said / "My children, I will be with you only a little longer... [and] Where I am going, you cannot come." Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." / Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!* (John 13:33, 37-38)

*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.* (Luke 22:14)

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." / Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. / "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."* (Mark 14:22-25)

*Then, Jesus looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* (John 17:1, 4-5)

*"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world... Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. / As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* (John 17:6-7, 18-19)

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17:20-21, 23)

*When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley...* (John 18:1)

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Passover Lamb—This is my body and my blood.

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# REFLECTIONS

March 28, 2021

**It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**

*John 13:1*

## Passover Feast—Part One

Peter and John saw a man carrying a jar of water and just as Jesus told them to, they followed him to a place with a spacious upper room—perfect for a Passover celebration. Love filled the room that evening. Around the Passover feast, Jesus washed the disciples' feet; predicted his death, whispered into his traitor's ear; prayed for himself, his disciples, and for you and me. Then, with his disciples, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley to face the worst.

*The evening meal was being served, [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. [Then,] he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" / Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." / "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." / Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (John 13:2, 4-8)*

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place... Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (John 13:12, 14-16)*

\*\*\*\*\*

(Jesus loved his disciples as one loves their children, and as a servant humbly serves his master. He cleansed their feet with water the same as He would come to cleanse their spirits and souls with the sacrifice of his body and blood. Not because they were worthy, but even if they weren't. Nothing was required to receive it—only to believe. So, it makes me wonder if Jesus had this scene in mind when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another, as I have loved you, love one another." Love, not because they're worthy, but even if they're not.)

\*\*\*\*\*

*Then, Jesus faced his disciples with a troubled spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." Then, dipping a piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.*

*Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly," ... (John 13:21, 26-27)*

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# REFLECTIONS

March 21, 2021

**"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

*Matthew 6:19-21*

## Judas' Footsteps

Sitting in the temple with His disciples lined up beside him, Jesus watched *the rich put their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* (Luke 21:1-4)

While Jesus watched the impoverished widow give all she had to God, Judas saw it too. I wonder what might have passed through his mind from what he saw, and what he heard? The poor widow gave everything she had to God. Possessed by Satan, Judas was readying to sellout the Lamb of God for the value of a slave.

Jesus selected each of his disciples. Judas was no exception. Other than his father's name, Simon, we know little of his background. But we do know that Judas' footsteps followed Jesus wherever He went throughout his public ministry. Judas heard the sermons preached from the hillsides, and the lessons taught through parables. Judas watched miracles unfold, and he was among the twelve disciples sent to preach a message to *"the lost sheep of Israel."* And during his time with Jesus, Judas surely felt the warmth and depth of Jesus' love. Yet, the lure of earthly treasures proved stronger than his commitment to Jesus or God the Father.

But before we cluck our tongues, let's remember the would-be follower who wanted *first* to bury his father (Luke 9:59-60;) and the rich young man who walked away from Jesus rather than let go of his position in life (Matthew 19:16-22). And let's not forget, Peter denied Jesus three times.

So today, I ask myself, what might I be choosing to hold on to that Jesus is asking me to leave behind? Jesus sacrificed his life so I may live forever beyond this world even as I cling to earthly things that will not endure. That choice follows in Judas' footsteps, not Jesus'.

*"Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe,"* the hymn's lyrics go.

So, should I betray Jesus for whatever the earthly treasures may be?

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# REFLECTIONS

March 14, 2021

**Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,  
"Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"  
"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the  
stones will cry out."**

*Luke 19:39-40*

## Stories from the Golden Gate

Peering across the Kidron Valley from the summit of the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem's Golden Gate grabbed center stage. Jerusalem's eastern wall housed its shell. Sealed in 1511 A.D., an outline of the Golden Gate still marks the place of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem astride a donkey and to cries of Hosanna! Hosanna! I wondered what it felt like to be in the crowd; and I wondered if the Gate could talk, what stories would it have to tell.

Across from my place atop the Mount of Olives, the frame of the Golden Gate faced me. Its outline cast a proud smile for the opportunity to greet Jesus into the City. The choice of entry likely related to its proximity to the Temple. I pondered the stories of Jesus' entries through it; and I wondered if a personified gate might have its own views of those stories to share with me.

I wondered what the Gate might have seen when Jesus sent two disciples into the City in search of a donkey. I pondered what a personified gate might wonder about the people standing there asking the disciples *"What are you doing, untying that colt?"* And the people allowing them to take the donkey after a brief explanation. (Mark 11:5)

I wondered how the gate might have felt watching Jesus descend the Mount of Olives on the donkey to cries of *"Hosanna!"* / *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"* (Mark 11:9, 11) And for the whole city to be stirred to ask, *"Who is this?"* when Jesus entered Jerusalem the next day followed by the crowds' reply, *"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

Would the gate express surprise by *Jesus' entry into the temple area [driving] out all who were buying and selling there; [and] to overturn the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"* (Matthew 21:12-13)

And how touching might it have been to watch Jesus observe *the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. And then also to watch a poor widow put in two very small copper coins, and hear Jesus explain, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* (Luke 21:1-4)

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# REFLECTIONS

March 7, 2021

**"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' "**

*John 1:29-31*

## John the Baptist's Message

The crowd along the Jordan Riverbanks gathered to hear John the Baptist's message of repentance and cleansing baptism. And I wonder what they thought when John called their attention to another person in the crowd. "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" I wonder how many of them realized what John was talking about?

Even before John's birth, he knew about Jesus. Remember how Mary hurried to Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth, her relative also with child. And Elizabeth said, "*As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*" (Luke 1:44) Zechariah and Elizabeth's baby became known as John the Baptist, and the one chosen by God to introduce Jesus to the world.

God prepared John the Baptist for his role, but his audience that day likely wondered what he was talking about when he referred to Jesus as the *Lamb of God*. Would it dawn on them that God sent Jesus into the world as God's own sacrifice for the sins of all who believed in him? But John the Baptist knew.

A quality commonly identified with good leaders is that they ask nothing of their subjects they, themselves, would not do. And *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16 KJV)

Ever hear an announcement with significance you didn't fully grasp until you looked back on its happening? Even with John the Baptist's further explanation: "*This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.*" His words likely hung in mystery with the gathering on the Jordan Riverbanks that day. Then, on Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, Peter finalized John's message:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.* (Acts 2:38-39, 41)

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

February 28, 2021

**For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,**

*Psalms 139:13-14*

## **Marvelously Made**

People, people, people everywhere—as many as the stars. I am but one insignificant face blended among them.

Many times through the years, these *Reflections* have referenced Psalm 139:14: *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*. Eugene Peterson paraphrased the verse in *The Message*, “...*I am marvelously made*.” Descriptive terms like splendid, strikingly beautiful, sumptuous in structure and adornment, and impressive in mind or spirit simply don’t connect with the reflection I see in the mirror each day. But God says they do. And Webster uses all those terms to define the word Peterson chose.

If these *Reflections* have an underlying theme, it’s that our lives matter to God. He has a purpose for them, and He made you and me just as we need to be to fulfill it. He carefully chose our parents, our birthplaces and the days to walk through this world; and He directed the paths through unique circumstances that define each of our lives.

Remember, God pulled an 80-year-old named Moses from a shepherd’s field to lead his people from slavery. He selected Esther to be queen for a time when God’s chosen people faced serious trouble. He picked an ordinary teenage virgin to give birth to his only Son; and God chose a man born blind, “*so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*.” (John 9:3)

No matter the image we see in the mirror, we are marvelously made. Don’t forget, Jesus *had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* (Isaiah 53:2-3)

God formed us in our mothers’ wombs. He gave us influence to shape lives around us the same way others shaped ours. And when the responsibility feels too great, God covered that too:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart / and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him, / and he will direct your paths.* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

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# REFLECTIONS

February 21, 2021

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness," God he created him; male and female he created them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.**

*Genesis 1:26-27, 31*

## Good Ole Days

From time to time, something draws our minds back to those good ole days. Of course, the good ole days break down into our own generations of days gone by. But whatever the generation, there is just something special about our lives that we long to carry on.

Imagine Adam and Eve recalling the good ole days where *streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. The Lord God had planted a garden there, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* (Genesis 2:6, 8-9)

Eden—the only period when the good ole days perfectly fits the term. What a gift! In love, God provided a residential paradise. Who could want more? Yet they did. The residents disobeyed and took God's gift granted. *So the Lord God banished [them] from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.* (Genesis 3:23-24)

Hard times carry our minds back to our good ole days—back to something precious then that's missing now. What makes those good ole days special isn't a time or place. What makes the good ole days special to us is God's love graciously given that we gratefully receive. But to carry it on, God instructed Moses to say:

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.* (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

*God so loved the world that He gave...* Too often though we fail to give back. And might that just be the precious something from the good ole days that's missing now?

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"* (Luke 10:27) And train our children to love him too. (Prov 22:6)

Oh! And one more thing. Good Ole Days spells G.O.D.

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*Richard +*

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

February 14, 2021

**All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.**

*Acts 2:44-45*

## **Swings, Slides, and See-Saws**

Whether real or imagined, faint memories of entering the first grade still stir fear-mixed excitement. Among familiar faces melded with many I'd never seen before, I passed through the school door into a new adventure.

For four enchanting years Alamo School became like a second home. Children I knew joined those I didn't to fill my classroom, the lunchroom, and the playground with new friends. We learned the "Three Rs" together there. And we learned about each other.

When I remember the playground today, I recall the recess bell setting off footraces for the swings, slides, and see-saws on a playground spacious enough to run freely and play other games. I believe that playground is where character was both developed and revealed. And on that playground, we began to learn how to manage our differences.

The swings attracted those with delight in the thrill of heights and the rush of air from speeding back and forth. There were those neighboring swings, but except for an occasional helpful push, there was little interaction with them. Swings seemed to fit those who found satisfaction in being alone and doing their own thing.

Slides provided a similar thrill, but sometimes while waiting in line for their turn, or when someone helped them after a landing went wrong, there were more opportunities for interaction with others.

Unlike swings and slides, see-saws require two people—two collaborative people. Each person alternates having both feet on the ground. When they thrust themselves up from that control position, control transfers to the other party on whom they then depend to return the favor. See-saw partners exercise trust as they alternate the positions of power and vulnerability. It requires the see-saw partners to: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considers others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* (Philippians 2:3-4)

Is a lesson there somewhere?

For a short time, that's what the early church did.

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# REFLECTIONS

February 7, 2021

**For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;**

*Psalms 139:13-14*

## Vocare—To Call

Buried somewhere in storage lays a scrapbook of my high school days. Besides a few small medals and mementoes noting a handful of achievements, there isn't much of importance there. Napkins from banquets I don't otherwise remember, photos from our Senior trip, and articles about the best football team our school ever had fill most of the pages. (I wasn't on it.) But one page is dedicated to a newspaper photo unrelated to those days. The photo captures only the sky and a few clouds. It is notable because the photographer captured an instant in time when clouds formed an unmistakable image of Jesus.

Think about it. A cloud-formed image sketched across the sky so one might imagine a voice from heaven say, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17) Or maybe in the wonder of that photo hearing Jesus say, "*Follow me.*"

Looking back today at the path my life has taken, I believe Jesus must have led me down it. I see now the many stops and turns we made along the way, the institutions that taught me, the jobs that fed me, the bosses who trained me, and the people and happenings that introduced me to life's realities. And they all finally led me to the place where I could see for the first time how fully my travels prepared me for my calling—*vocare*.

Frederick Buechner explained *vocare*, "[as] the place where your deep gladness and the world's great hunger meet."<sup>5</sup> Or like the composers wrote, I found "The Wind Beneath My Wings." *Reflections* dated March 26, 2006 describes the wind as "the passion of your heart and that's what makes you fly." So, when I discovered how God intended my giftedness to serve Him in my work *and* in my personal life, I found my calling. Then like Dorothy searching for home in the *Wizard of Oz*, I discovered I had been there all along.

Now, about adding the photo of a cloud-sketched Jesus to my scrapbook, I don't recall my thoughts then. But I believe I saved it because I felt Jesus calling *me*. Then unknowingly, I followed him down the path to the *vocation* God planned for me before the world began.

So, if you're wondering now why I felt called to tell you my story. It's not because it's my story. It's because Buechner said if I tell it right, you may find in it a bit of your story too.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*, New York: Seabury, 1969; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*, San Francisco; Harper & Row, 1991

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# REFLECTIONS

January 31, 2021

**In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned**

*Titus 2:7-8*

## Show and Tell

Imagine yourself left alone by your mentor with an assignment you feel ill prepared to perform. Then, grasping for help, you rip open a letter from him that reads:

*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished...* and he follows with a long list of things you must teach. (Titus 1:5-9)

“But I’m no teacher!” you cry. Only you are! We all are.

God built into us a heart that beats, lungs that breathe, a brain that thinks and senses to guide us toward preservation. And we don’t need to do much to make them work. But for most other needs we need a teacher—and we are tapped for the job. *Train a child in the way he should go*, the proverb reads. And that’s only for starters.

Some form of the word *teach*, appears about 400 times in the NIV Bible. And when the various synonyms like *train* and *instruct* are added, the tally reaches well over 500. And those words don’t include teaching methods like write, preach, and explain. Nor does the count include perhaps the most important of all—*show*.

*Show me your ways, O Lord, / teach me your paths* (Psalms 25:4) ... *you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.* (Hebrews 5:12) It’s Show and Tell.

We are all called to teach, but it may be all for naught unless we also show it too.

Each of us teach life lessons to the many whose paths we cross in our lifetimes. Behavior reveals both the principles we hold dear and the temptations that draw us from them. And the balance between the good and evil practices we display will define the legacy we leave in this world. The enduring lessons we teach are not from the words we speak or directions we give. Enduring lessons come from the teachings we live.

*Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.* (Exodus 18:20) Jesus did.

*Jesus went [about,] teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.* (Matthew 4:23-24)

*"The most important [command] is this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:29-31)

Because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, Jesus chose obedience. (John 3:16) And because Jesus loved us, he chose the cross.

Show and Tell. It’s the lesson Jesus showed us. And what Paul asked Titus to do.

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# REFLECTIONS

January 24, 2021

**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and  
with all your soul and with all your strength.**

*Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

## The Shema

Moses delivered it. Jesus affirmed it. An early church lived it—at least for a while.

The Shema summarized God's expectation for mankind. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Jesus affirmed it. *"The most important [command,]" answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" He added: "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:29-31)

On Pentecost Peter warned and pleaded with the people, *"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:40-47)

The Shema, is there a better example? They placed God first; and loved their neighbor. But can anyone live their entire life that way? Jesus didn't remove the Shema. He affirmed it.

So, here we are: *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7:18, 20, 24)

John explained, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us".* (1 John 4:10-12)

*Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:25) We are forgiven!

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

January 17, 2021

**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself  
through Christ and gave us the ministry of  
reconciliation...**

*2 Corinthians 5:18*

## **Ministers of Reconciliation**

Paul, or Saul of Tarsus as he was first known, has been referenced in many of these *Reflections*. As a dedicated and highly educated Pharisee, he first purposed his life to protect and defend God's law as his teachers had taught. His purpose may have been well intended, but his actions often maligned it instead. *Love your neighbor as yourself* is central both to the Law of Moses and Jesus' teachings; but Saul's actions exemplified neither.

His horrific attacks on a movement of Jesus' followers called the Way built a terrorist's reputation. The reputation preceded his travels wherever he went, and repudiated Jesus' command to *love your enemies*.

One can speculate why Jesus chose to encounter Paul on the Damascus road. Jesus may have been attracted to Paul's competitive nature as suggested by his references to the importance of training and perseverance to athletic performance. Or maybe Paul's persuasive writing and speech made him a prime candidate for the job Jesus had in mind for him. Or Jesus may have wanted you and me to see how God uses sinners to server his purposes. But whatever the reason for Jesus' choice, Paul had a reputation to address before he could effectively do the job.

Words may be inspirational, and wisdom may turn heads, but no matter their allure, wisdom and words fall unheeded unless the speaker is also known to live them. So, Paul's reputation needed repair.

God uses wilderness experiences to produce a state of brokenness. Brokenness is the condition when one is unable to help themselves *and* is willing admit it. Examples include Joseph's years of separation from his family to develop his leadership skills; Daniel's months in captivity to formulate his prophecies; and John the Baptist and Apostle Paul had years in the wilderness to prepare their messages. But at least as important, to prepare to live them out.

God reconciled all of these to himself through Christ and gave them roles in the ministry of reconciliation.

Now today, doesn't it seem like a good time for Jesus to place such a call to you and me?

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# REFLECTIONS

January 10, 2021

**My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted  
hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name  
together.**

*Psalms 34:2-3*

## Seasons of Trouble

He might have thrown back his shoulders and taken credit for his immense power and vast land and livestock holdings. He could have shown pride in his good health, loving wife, ten fun loving children, and servants enough for every need. But he didn't. Instead, Job looked at himself as a man blessed by God; and he never once removed his eyes from the source of it all. Still, he couldn't see the storm brewing until... Poof!

It was gone—all of it! His servants slain by the sword, his ten children crushed in a storm, livestock slaughtered or stolen. Disgust even replaced his wife's love.

Job's story is among the most difficult to read in all the Bible. But as tough it may be to read; it must have been excruciating to live. And God allowed it. Yet, even in his seasons of trouble, Job reasoned, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; /Blessed be the name of the Lord."* (1:21 NJKV) And Job accepted, *"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* (2:10)

Seasons of trouble blow through everyone's life. Should we expect otherwise? Jesus warned, *"In this world you will have trouble."* (John 16:33) And to the Romans, Paul wrote:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* (8:16-17)

Peter said it this way: *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* (1 Peter 2:21)

Job stood strong, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, /and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. / And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;"* (19:25-26)

David too, *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; /he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."* (34:4-5) And

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, /And saves those who are crushed in spirit. /Many are the afflictions of the righteous; /But the Lord delivers him out of them all.* (34:18-19 NASB)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a [huge crowd] of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* (Hebrews 12:1-3)

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# REFLECTIONS

January 3, 2021

**Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

## Broken

Give thanks for the pandemic of 2020? And give thanks to God for allowing COVID-19 to change life as we have known it by causing death of so many, and placing the world in a broken state? It feels unnatural to give thanks for such brokenness.

One might agree that the word ‘broken’ describes the state of the world today. But it’s not the first time for it. The world first fell into brokenness when a sneaky snake convinced Eve and Adam to eat fruit from a forbidden tree. Broken. Then, to get their attention, God expelled the world’s first couple from the perfect home He had made for them.

Soon, mankind strayed again. Broken. God responded with a great flood. Then finding the Israelites broken in Egypt, God, through Moses, led the enslaved people to the promised land only to have them faithlessly refuse to enter it. Broken. And on and on the stories go—mankind drifting from God into brokenness and God restoring them once they turned to him for help again. Likely, events leading up to today will also make history—broken.

Broken is the state when one is unable to help themselves, *and*, willing admit it. Maybe that’s the reason Paul told us to *give thanks in all circumstances*, great and small, good things and bad. When all our efforts fail, and there are no other places to turn, only then do we turn to God for help. Paul did and he learned: “*I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

God warned us not to forget: *When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you — a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant — then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD...* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

*So, dear God, we turn to you today. The world is broken and we, your children, are to blame. We try to fix it ourselves because of pride that wants to prove we don’t need you; that we are as powerful as you. Some choose to believe you don’t exist at all. But our efforts seem only to aggravate it more. And throughout all the years from that beautiful beginning, only our brokenness lifts our heads to you. Today gracious LORD, we raise our arms and lift our faces to you.*

*And we discover then that reaching solely to you is all you have asked of us all along.  
Amen*

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