



REFLECTIONS

July 17, 2022, From the Archives of June 24, 2012

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord

Genesis 8:20

Monuments to God

The entryways are bounded by stone carvings that represent our biblical past—images of people and events that honored God. There are hundreds of them. The carvings offer an introduction to the monuments found inside the walls of the majestic cathedral in Paris called Notre Dame.

Inside this grand cathedral are countless other monuments that honor and symbolize love for the Lord our God. Stained glass windows disperse the light glistening through them to cast kaleidoscopes of brilliance into a sacred setting. Candles reflect the prayers placed by those passing through while bells ring in celebration and choir voices echo praises to God throughout the sanctuary. Stately chandeliers hang from steep pitched ceilings that reach toward the sky, and altars decorated with precious metals offer invitations for prayer. All are monuments to God.

Notre Dame Cathedral, with all the many monuments contained within its walls, is itself a monument to God. Such monuments have been built in honor of our God for centuries. Solomon's Temple was dedicated to YAWEH almost 3,000 years ago; and even before that, the Bible records that Noah built an altar to God after the great flood. These and many others have been mankind's attempts to honor God and to express love *for* him. But as magnificent as these monuments were or may be, none can adequately express appreciation for the love *of* God.

God is love, the scripture tells us. No matter the beauty of them, colorful glass pieces bound together can't express the warmth of God's love. But people can. No structure, no matter its size or majestic design can convey the depth of God's love. But people can.

God made each of us in his own image, and He sent his Son to reveal his love and to encourage us to love the way He does. *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34-35)

Most of us will never have a hand in building monuments to God like those within the walls of Notre Dame Cathedral, or a magnificent temple like Solomon, or even an altar like Noah. But there is an opportunity for something even more.

The greatest monument we can offer our loving God is the dedication of our lives as a monument to his unfailing love.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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REFLECTIONS

July 10, 2022, Refreshed from the Archives of July 22, 2012

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

John 14:27

Well with My Soul

"It is well with my soul." These words whispered through the minds of all in the room as the ripple of piano keys streamed the melody of their grace. They rekindled a piercing sting in the hearts of some, emptiness of loss in others; but forgiveness and hope conquered both, and peace quieted their souls.

But where did the peace come from? Was it the same place that makes ripples from a flowing stream soothing, or the stillness of a lake in the dawn of a new day tranquil? Restfulness of a gentle breeze rustling through the leaves comes from somewhere. Is it from the same place as cheerfulness from birds singing in the treetops, or the assurance of ocean waves lapping onto a deserted beach?

God thought of everything in the beautiful world He made. He thought of the sun for radiance, the moon for comforting glow, and glittering stars to adorn a darkened sky. The land, the sea, the grasses, and the trees decorate our lives with his grace. But also He made some things we can only feel.

He gave us joy that we might celebrate, sadness that we might grieve, sounds to stir our minds, and scents to savor the aromas of his creation. God gave us anger that we might rebel, and He gave us tenderness that we might forgive.

Free will is his design too, although He knew our choices would sometimes lead to heartache and pain. So He offered us comfort through music we play, songs we sing, poems we read, and the soothing sounds that surround our lives every day. And He gave us each other that we might love.

So when pain sends its piercing sting into my heart, and loss empties life into the darkest cavern, I go in search of peace somewhere—a place to hear the river gently flow, birds chirping in the trees, and a gentle breeze rustling through the leaves. Then, with the faith of a little child trusting fully in the arms of those who gave it birth, do I discover God's love alongside, bundled in the world around me all the while. In Him there is perfect peace.

And in God's perfect peace, it is well with my soul.

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REFLECTIONS

July 3, 2022, Refreshed from the Archives of July 8, 2012

The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."

Genesis 11:6-7

A Common Language

We felt honored by Palestinian Christians from a little Anglican church in a small Israel town who extended an invitation to join their weekly worship service. Their open arms and broad smiles greeted our small contingent of American tourists like long lost brothers and sisters.

We worshiped in their native tongue before they repeated it graciously for us in English. But they always read the liturgy and sang the hymns in our respective languages simultaneously.

To outsiders it would have sounded like the unsynchronized noise of an orchestra in warmup—that is until the final word of the liturgy and the last lyric of the musical score ended in near perfect unity. Only then did we feel the depth of its beauty. We had spoken the same words but in different languages; sung the same lyrics but in different tongues; had come from different cultures but worshiped the same Lord. Through Him we became one.

It took me back to the first Pentecost after the resurrection:

All of [us] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in [our respective] tongues as the Spirit enabled [us.]

When they heard this sound, [we] came together in bewilderment, because each one heard [the other] speaking in his own language. (From Acts 2:4, 6-7)

We were struck that day by the familiarity of the worship service and the hospitality extended to us. We found the congregants surprisingly youthful, passionate for Christ, and the number of children actively participating in the service impressive. Given the thousands of miles that separate our homes and the cultural differences that lead to political divide, our hearts were warmed to discover that together we were one people speaking a common language to send the good news of Jesus Christ.

With Jesus Christ as a common language, nothing would be impossible.

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REFLECTIONS

June 26, 2022

"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

Remembering the Good Ole Days

More about memories. Sometimes they take us back to places we don't want to go. But they also take us back to a place we call "the good ole days." What happened to them? And what happened to "the good ole days" Mom and Dad remember, or those of my grandparents' memories? There's something about the past we long for life to be again.

But life has moved on, hasn't it? Partly for the good. Partly not so good. Tragic accidents, economic crises, and natural disasters reshaped life for us. And technological advances? Well, it's hard to fully grasp the impact of those on our way of life. But we can sum it up—the good ole days are waning from our memory, displaced by the realities of the present. God warned us about it: *"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget..."* Now, I wonder if our memories have forgotten too much before we shared them with our children.

God blessed us with free will; but He also warned of the consequences of our decisions. For falling prey to the serpent's temptation, God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden. Paradise lost! But that's not all: *To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children."* (Genesis 3:16)

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife ... / "Cursed is the ground because of you; / through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:17)

To help prioritize our decisions, God set some standards to live by: have no other Gods before me; honor your father and mother; remember the sabbath; and to love your neighbor. The good ole days seemed to abide by those standards. God asks us to share our memories about them with our children. Unshared memories die, and with them, so do the good ole days.

So, what's the answer to return to the good ole days? It may seem that joy is pleasure we take from life; but joy comes from what we give to it. Love God. Love your neighbor. Might those God given commands be the recipe for the Good Ole Days?

Unshared recipes pass away.

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REFLECTIONS

June 19, 2022

The memory of the righteous will be a blessing,
Proverbs 10:7

Heartfelt Memories

We drove past the little church giving it little notice. The church I grew up in depicted the state of my hometown. Old. But then, so am I. Once filled with life, now embattled to sustain it. One can choose to focus on the empty storefronts around the town square, or the diminishing congregation attending Sunday services, or wrinkled brows marking the faces of my classmates, or the absence of friends passed on from this world. But God graciously blessed us with a beautiful alternative. Memories.

Memories are a blessing that keeps us connected whether we see and touch each other or not. Age inspires them. Reunions rekindled them. The sight of classmates' smiling faces, the feel of their firm handshakes, sincerity of their hugs, and the stories they tell bring life to memories. Our entire lives are planted there; and we may harvest the fruit from them whenever we choose to recall them.

In his poem, *Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, "*I am a part of all I ever met.*" Life first met me in my hometown. My education began there, heartwarming, and painful life lessons were taught there. The place, the times, and the lives of the dear hearts and gentle people who lived there shaped the values I still honor every day, all securely locked in my memory.

Heartfelt memories enlivened the church as we drove quietly by it that day. They restored freshness and thriving commerce to the deteriorating town square; and heartfelt memories bloomed from the smiles of schoolmates I talked with and even from those whose faces were missing. All of it indelibly a part of who I came to be.

Memories—a blessing of life. Our lives are planted there.

Mine is a personal copy of the footprint my life will leave in this world.

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REFLECTIONS

June 12, 2022, Refreshed from the Archives of September 13, 2009

[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. / Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:7-8

What is Love Anyway?

Mema quickly corrected my word choice when I used this one incorrectly. “Love is always about people, never about things,” she would say. Even at a young age, I knew what my grandmother meant when I used love as a figure of speech to express pleasure I received from something sensory or an object of pleasure. But to her love was too precious to misapply.

Perhaps no other word is more powerful than love; yet there may be few words more misused. Love is a term to express feelings about so many things that have nothing to do with its real meaning. We love chocolate, football, movies, books, and so on. But love is not a fitting term for those. So, what is love anyway?

Keith Miller explains Christian love in his book, *A Second Touch*, by recalling Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He discovers in his own reading that:

“...Jesus was evidently *not* filled with a warm *feeling* of loving desire to die for man. As a matter of fact, our term for extreme discomfort, ‘sweating blood’ likely came from His experience that night. He evidently ‘sweated blood’ and prayed three times for a way *not* to perform this most loving act. And when He did agree to go, the love was expressed not by His *feeling* but by the fact that he acted out of love for His father *whether He felt like it or not!*”

Wow! If this is true, then Christian love is not based on the *feeling* I had always longed for. Christian love is simply an act of the kind God wants performed for another person’s health and wholeness to help fulfill His will for that person. And my *performing* that act in Christ’s perspective and concern is the *love*, not my warm feeling *about* it.”¹

If she was here today, I believe Mema would stand by her belief; “One should never grieve for things that can’t grieve for you, and one should never express love for something that can’t love back.” So, what is love anyway? Love is about obedience to God. And except for love of God, love is not always about warm *feelings* toward another. As Miller said, “Christian love is simply *an act of the kind God wants performed for another person’s health and wholeness to help fulfill His will for that person...*”² (Italics added.)

Love is the care for others no matter how we feel. And remember, “love never fails.”

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¹ Miller, Keith, *A Second Touch*, Word Books, 1967, p. 86

² Ibid

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REFLECTIONS

June 5, 2022

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.

1 Corinthians 12:12

Made to Order

What is it about the Mona Lisa? How did Da Vinci paint her eyes to follow you across the room? And how can one portrait capture such an array of emotions from one pose? Da Vinci had the talent for it. He painted her just as he wanted her to be just as *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...* (Genesis 1:1)

God made them just the way He wanted them to be. But that's not all. He created order within every part so they always worked without requiring much of his attention. Just pause in your busy day to take in all the wonders of the world God created. There are more than seven.

Then God set the world in perpetual motion, each component orderly designed to reproduce itself and multiply like He asked mankind to do. And in mysterious ways, each of those orderly designed components depend on one another for resources to work properly. In other words, God made every part of the world fit together to make one body.

God made people fit together that way too. *So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be... As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 18, 20)

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ...But God has combined the members of the body... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now [we] are the body of Christ, and each one of [us] is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:21, 24-27)

Each of us has been made to order—just as God wanted us to be and to do what He wants us to do; but He also gave us the freedom to do as we choose. So, for us to fit together as one, He asked us to choose to love one another. Love is not love unless we chose to do it. Too often it seems we choose not to. But loving one another is not God's first commandment.

The first is: *"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."* (Matthew 22:37-38) Yet, that's the command we seem to most blindly neglect even though it's the whole reason He made us.

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

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REFLECTIONS

May 29, 2022

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

Proverbs 22:6

An Inspiring Influence

They lived a simple life. Millie worked as an assistant to our hometown doctor who personally trained her for the job. Jack and his brother owned the grocery store their father started years before. Jack and Millie both put in long hours in their chosen vocations; but neither hard work nor meager income erased smiles from their faces or the joys of life from their hearts. Difficult times didn't break their spirit either.

They both grew up in the depression, lived through the Dust Bowl, and supported their country through World War II. Millie went on with life as best she could, loyal to her job, maintaining their home, but always with a smile and an energetic heart for people while Jack served in the War's Pacific theater. His letters to Millie noted that he "flew the hump" more than a few times. "The Hump" was the name given an airborne route where unpressurized, two-propeller transport planes, heavily loaded with essential supplies, flew through unfathomable weather conditions at elevations above 20,000-foot over the Himalayas from India to China. Even as a 5-year-old boy I could sense "the hump" placed Jack in harm's way.

At war's end, Jack and Millie's small home renewed its place for their friends to gather to play cards on the living room floor, board games around the dining room table, ping pong and croquet in the backyard, or simply enjoy lively conversation. Still, Jack and Millie placed priority on serving their church, and doing their part to make our little town friendly and warm.

"*Train a child in the way he should go...*," the Proverb reads. With no children of their own, perhaps it inspired Jack and Millie's dedication to children and youth. Millie kept a toy box in the front bedroom closet to entertain toddlers when their parents stopped by, and entertained older ones with indoor games or occasionally chasing about in their large backyard. And Jack...

Over the years, Jack provided summer jobs to no small number of teenagers. And who can count the miles driven to deliver football players to their rural homes after late afternoon practices, or the years Jack and Millie hosted high school graduation parties in their backyard.

It's extraordinary to think of the influence on those young lives who connected with and through this devoted couple. God didn't bring Jack and Millie into the world to live big or have a family. They served God with their lives rich in character and the warmth of a servant's heart.

What an inspiring influence to leave in the lives of the young.

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REFLECTIONS

May 22, 2022

**"But as for me and my household, we will
serve the Lord."**

Joshua 24:15

Purpose to Live For

November 2, 1939, a banner day for a budding branch of my family. That day Mom and Dad celebrated the arrival of a screaming, bald headed baby boy. And me? Okay, I was the center of all the commotion that day; but the celebration was about the growth of our family.

Family is God's creation. He began his on the sixth day, *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female.* And gave them a purpose to live for: *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."* (Genesis 1:27-28) For *this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:24)

God gave them orderly roles: He said, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...* (Ephesians 5:25-26)

Wives, fit in with your husbands' plans; for then if they refuse to listen when you talk to them about the Lord, they will be won by your respectful, pure behavior. Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words... Be beautiful inside, in your hearts, with the lasting charm of a gentle and quiet spirit that is so precious to God. (1 Peter 3:1-2, 4 TLB)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"-which is the first commandment with a promise— "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

And God's instruction didn't stop there. *Train a child in the way he should go, / and when he is old he will not turn from it.* (Proverbs 22:6) And He meant it:

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)

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

When we grow our families and instill God's design into it, emotionally, behaviorally, and spiritually, we express our love for one another. When we express our love for one another, are we not expressing our love for God.

“[So] as for me and my [family], we will serve the Lord.”

“You are the light of the world,”

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REFLECTIONS

May 15, 2022

**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered himself
unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences
from acts that lead to death, so that we may
serve the living God!**

Hebrews 9:14

Dismayed

Dismay echoed in his voice; disbelief in what he had become. With all the evil things Paul had done in the name of God, who wouldn't. But God let him do those terrible things! And there Paul sat, writing instructions and explanations for his trainee to follow in Paul's footsteps.

First, he urged Timothy to pray for everyone, especially those in authority, that they would all live quiet and peaceful lives in holiness, and that they would learn the truth that there is one God, and one mediator between them, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his life that they may be saved. And then, Paul's big surprise—"I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles." (1 Timothy 2:7)

Now how did that happen!

Paul (or Saul as he was known then) set about on a career to serve God. He went to the best schools, trained under a premier teacher of the law, and he rose in the ranks of the Pharisees to become a zestful leader and a vicious enforcer of God's law.

Once, when a crowd heard Stephen accuse them of disobedience to God's law, ... *they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. ...And Saul was there, giving approval to [Stephen's] death. [After that,] Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.* (Acts 7:56-57, 8:1, 3)

Yet, Jesus wanted Paul no matter what bad things he had done. So He grabbed Paul's attention on the road to Damascus, sent him to the desert to sort things out, exposed him to Christian leaders, then to Paul's dismay, sent him on the road to become "*a herald and an apostle ... and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*"

And we may be dismayed and disbelieving to hear that no matter what bad things we have done, Jesus wants you and me too.

He sacrificed his life *so that we may serve the living God!*

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REFLECTIONS

May 8, 2022

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

Sitting Here

Now, I find myself sitting here staring at this page while all kinds of thoughts bounce around in my mind. But this one lingers: “[I am God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that [I] should walk in them.”

I exist. In God’s creation, I exist!

Even back “*In the beginning [when] God created the heavens and the earth...*” God included me in his plan to be sitting here right where I am now — cluttered thoughts and all. What a blessing God has given. But why did he put me here?

God works in mysterious ways. We all know that; but we also know we may never fully understand the plans he has for us. But here’s what we do know:

The Psalmist wrote in 139:14 “... *I am fearfully and wonderfully made...*” So God’s plan may have placed me right where I am for me to listen to him as I once did:

That day, I found myself wonder struck by retracing the path I had traveled through this world. I thought about where I was born, my mom and dad, the family I have, the work I do, my friends, and others who influenced the person I became. I thought about experiences that shaped my life, both the inspiring ones and the disheartening. I thought about the talents God blessed me with and how I use them. And I remembered those times of joy that still warm my heart.

So, I’m sitting here now, staring at this page while all kinds of thoughts bounce around in my mind. Getting older seems to cause time to pass more quickly, but at the same time, aging slows the body and sometimes the mind. A new season emerges, and I wonder if my life’s most lasting legacy resides there. But whatever the newest season proves, I know my Redeemer lives, and because he lives, I will exist with him forever. And not because of anything I did for him, but because of what he did for me.

God gave me life. And Christ gave me life everlasting. So I want to live it to the glory of God, using the giftedness He blessed me with, in the setting He placed me to live, and by staying true to the person He shaped me to be.

And if I give it my best, I believe I will have answered God’s plan for me.

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REFLECTIONS

May 1, 2022, Refreshed from the Archives of January 28, 2007

— this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

1 John 1:1-2

Life Preservers

Pillars of the Earth, a Ken Follett novel, centers on the arduous task of building a great cathedral in the twelfth century; but the theme of the book features the struggles for life in those times. One of the most awakening portrayals in the book was the insensitivity to human life. A father would die, or a child would be killed with little emotion expressed over the life lost. Everyone seemed conditioned to accept death with little emotion.

In our world today, we witness insensitivity to human life as terrorists uncaringly erase innocent lives and even choose to take their own. Life seemingly has little value. In contrast to that view, the culture we live in values human life perhaps like no culture before. We take great measure to extend it and improve its quality.

God honors human life, after all He created it; and we honor Him with our unending quest to prolong life and enhance its quality.

But I wonder if we place the same value on preserving life eternal. As we look to our growing knowledge of science, medicine, and technology to make earthly life longer, should we not also be growing spiritually to achieve even greater strides to preserve life beyond this world? To prolong earthly life requires a growing knowledge of science, technology, and medicine. But only a few among us are equipped in these fields. But all of us are called to be life preservers.

When we allow Christ to work through us, we become his instruments to lead others to a life in eternity. It doesn't require science or technology or medicine. It only requires the testimony of God's love through a friendly smile, a caring hand, or a warm invitation to everyone who would like to join us.

And as Christ shines through us, so does God's gift to human life—life eternal.

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REFLECTIONS

April 24, 2022

“When Jesus rose early in the morning of the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...”

Mark 16:9

Our Risen Lord

The tomb was empty! And Mary Magdalene wasted no time to let Peter and John hear about it. *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him,”* she said. (John 20:2) Hearing that, the two disciples raced to the tomb. *[They] ...saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.* (John 20:6-7) Although they found the tomb orderly as if the occupant had made his bed before departing his resting place, Jesus was not there just as Mary had said.

Mary remained behind after the disciples left her. Perhaps tears blurred her vision, or expectations clouded her mind, but when Jesus appeared to her, she did not recognize him until he called her name, *“Mary.”* (John 20:16)

Scripture tells of other appearances over the next forty days, including the women who accompanied Mary Magdalene to the tomb, Peter, the chosen disciples in the upper room, and 500 brethren at the same time. But after his ascension from the Mount of Olives, our risen Lord also revealed himself to a few others.

Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos; he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus; and he appeared to Stephen while angry Sanhedrin leaders prepared to stone him to death. The stoning scene displaces imagination:

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:55-56)

Now pause to reflect on the many trials we are called to face in this life. And as those trials come along, recall Jesus’ promise: *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

When the Sanhedrin leaders began casting their stones, Stephen saw *“heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*

“Where, O death, is your victory? / Where, O death, is your sting?”

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

(1 Corinthians 15:55, 57)

“You are the light of the world,”

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REFLECTIONS

April 17, 2022

**“John saw Jesus coming toward him and said,
‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the
sin of the world!’”**

John 1:29-30

Lamb of God

Something felt profoundly familiar about the man John saw walking toward him. The man may have *looked* familiar too, but from his aura, wonder sprung from John’s lips, “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*”

God watched from his throne that day while the story He crafted unfolded along the waters of the Jordan river. “*I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him,*” John the baptizer continued with the introduction of God’s cherished Son. ... “*I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.*” (John 1:32, 34)

Of course, God began the story in the Garden where Adam and Eve abused God’s gift of free will. God cleaned up the mess they made with a massive flood, but He knew mankind would fall again. So, He crafted another plan to cleanse sins away.

That part of the story began with a man named Abram whose name God changed to Abraham and promised him a long-awaited son. God also introduced the power of sacrificial love when He asked Abraham to sacrifice the life of that cherished son as an expression his love for God. And with unquestioning obedience Abraham followed God’s command.

Then God wrote stories about Joseph, Abraham’s Christlike great-grandson, the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, and God’s call through a burning bush for Moses to lead them into the land He promised to Abraham. But to get there required another sacrifice to wash away their sins. Only blood could do it—the blood of a cherished lamb without blemish. Those who made the sacrifice revealed their love for God by painting their doorframes with the blood of the Passover lamb so God would save their lives. (See Exodus 12:3-13)

God must have wept when He heard the cry of the Lamb of God from the cross, “*It is finished,*” [Then he bowed] his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

And on a Sunday morning while it was still dark, God must have wiped tears from his own eyes as He watched Mary Magdalen on the way to the tomb. She would find it empty.

Christ has risen.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

“*You are the light of the world,*”

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REFLECTIONS

April 10, 2022

**“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’
When he had said this, he breathed his last.”**

Luke 23:46 NKJV

For the Love of Jesus

“But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.” (Luke 23:49)

Among those watching stood Joseph, a man from the Arimathea, a city of the Jews. Although a prominent member of Council, he had not voted to crucify Jesus. Like his good friend, Nicodemus, Joseph had secretly become a disciple of Jesus.

For his love of Jesus, Joseph’s heart ached helplessly when Jesus took his final breath. His wealth and prominent position had always been enough to satisfy his desires, but now? What could he do!

In preparation of his own death, Joseph had hewed a tomb near the crucifixion site. It had never been used; and Joseph could afford another one. Maybe his prominence on the Council could provide access to Governor Pilate, and perhaps a little influence too. So,

“...Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. ...With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. (John 19:38-40)

For the love of Jesus, *“Mary Magdalen, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood among the women who had followed [Jesus] from Galilee and from Jerusalem too. They observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.” (See Luke 23:55-56 NKJV)*

Then, for the love of Jesus, *“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb....” (Luke 24:1...)*

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REFLECTIONS

April 3, 2022

“The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’”

Luke 23:47

Beneath the Cross

Dark clouds lingered deep below the horizon. Soon they would roll in to symbolize the world’s darkest day. Meanwhile, a small but growing crowd made its way to a rocky hill called Golgotha. A group of soldiers waited there, duty bound, to crucify three criminals struggling to carry their crosses up its rugged slope.

While waiting, the soldiers entertained themselves with stories they had heard about the crimes the three alleged criminals committed, most notably by the man named Jesus. They sneered at his claim to be the Son of God, and how He would rebuild the temple in three days. Someone may have also told *how* “*the governor's soldiers... stripped [Jesus] and put a scarlet robe on him, they spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ...Then they led him away to crucify him.*” (Matthew 27:29(a), 30, 31(b))

As the criminals reached the site, an artisan raced to place a sign on the cross above Jesus’ head as Pontius Pilate instructed. The sign read, THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

From the cross, Jesus prayed, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” (Luke 23:34) The crowd heard his compassion, but they saw a man beaten and humiliated, human spit drying on his face. Suffering, mocked, and naked. But beneath the cross a flurry of activity portrayed the divergent emotions of the witnesses. A few came to show their love for him; some came to chastise and demean him; and some were there to help crucify him.

Jesus’ disciples were not to be found at the scene; only John made his way near the cross. Also “*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*” (John 19:25-27)

About the sixth hour, those dark clouds began to roll in, the sun stopped shining and darkness fell on the whole land. In the temple, the curtain was torn in two. Then Jesus cried in a loud voice, “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,*” and breathed his last. (See Luke 23:44-46)

From beneath the cross, “*the centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’*”

“*You are the light of the world,*”

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REFLECTIONS

March 27, 2022

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.”

Ephesians 2:4-5

Unconditional Love

Jesus on the cross. Most of us have seen artists' depictions of the scene. Spikes driven through his wrists, blood dripping from his forehead, lips parched by the sun, and his cries. Oh! his agonizing cries, *“I thirst.”* (John 19:28 NKJV) Forsaken cries, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46) And His final cry, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30)

Jesus on the cross, the sins of the world borne for all who placed something worldly ahead of their love for God; who abused God's holy name; who worked on the Sabbath day, for those with shortened lives for dishonoring their mothers and fathers. And for everyone who murdered someone in form or fact; violated the sacred vows of marriage; who took something that belonged to someone else, intentionally led anyone away from the truth, or who coveted their neighbors' life. (See Exodus 20:3-17)

In short, Jesus carried to the cross the unfathomable burden of all who did not love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength, and who failed to love their neighbor as themselves. And with his final spirit yielding cry, *“It is finished,”* Jesus wiped our reprehensible records clean. (See John 19:30)

Surely God, standing behind his unconditional love for us, must have wept for his Son while He watched the scene unfold.

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in him would have everlasting life.

“You are the light of the world,”

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REFLECTIONS

March 20, 2022

“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:27

A Cross to Bear

We all have one—it may feel like more. The world is a tough place to live. And the pursuit of happiness may be an inalienable right, but it isn't a piece of cake to achieve. We have a cross to drag along, a weighty one, that makes every step a challenge to take.

Happiness produces smiles. That's the sign of it. Happy homes are painted with cheerfulness; but even a fresh coat dries quickly and flakes onto the ground. Happy people wake with a smile on their face and a sparkle in their eye, hoping for the day to be the first without a prickly pebble in their shoe. But it *is* there, always there, every step a reminder of the burden to bear. Jesus spoke of it:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Think about it. In Jesus' day crucifixion was the most feared and disgraceful form of execution. The cross symbolized the excruciating pain to endure. Yet Jesus willfully placed the weight of the world's sin on his shoulders and dragged them through the streets of Jerusalem to sacrificially face crucifixion on a hill called Golgotha.

Yes. Each of us has a cross to bear too. We were not given them as something to complain about or to blame for our failures. The cross may be a pebble perpetually imbedded in a shoe, or it may be something painful beyond imagination; but our burdens serve as reminders of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, and as inspiration to dedicate our lives to follow him.

Our lives make a difference in the people in the small corners of the world we live in, some of them we may not even know. So, may each of us take up our crosses, however painful they may be, and as Paul encouraged the Colossians:

“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. 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.” (3:16-17)

“You are the light of the world,”

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REFLECTIONS

March 13, 2022

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:3

That Man, Jesus

Fully God. Fully Man—It's hard to imagine someone that way, isn't it. Our minds don't want to allow both to reside in the body of one person. He's either one or the other, not both.

Even God is hard for us to imagine without giving him a humanlike face with eyes, ears, and a mouth, with hands raised above his greyed head pointing toward something He wants us to do. So that man, Jesus, fathered by God, borne of a woman, entered our world in human form to experience life as *we* envision it to be.

We watched him reject Satan's tempting promises, felt his compassion for the suffering, and shared his tear-stained sorrow over the death of a friend just as other men would. But He performed miracles as no other man. He calmed the sea, healed the sick, he walked on water, and turned water into wine; then to further confirm his deity, Jesus rose from the grave.

"[That man, Jesus] did not come into the world to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Apostle Paul saw the qualities of a role model in Jesus' humanity when he said, *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross."* (Philippians 2:5-8)

Yes, that man, Jesus did some things only God could do. But as a man, Jesus modeled the way we should try to live. He *made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*. And he brought glory to the Father when *he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross*.

"You are the light of the world,"

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REFLECTIONS

March 6, 2022

**Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.**

Psalms 119:105

Meditation

The late Bryant Nelson, founder of the Bible Broadcasting Network (BBN), presented a daily radio segment called *Take a Minute*. After posing ideas to ponder, he concluded with a word from the Bible, “Selah!” he said. “Meditate on this.”

Today’s *Reflections* is more a note to readers about thoughts I need to meditate on. The word **meditate** suggests pondering about something endeavoring to understand it deeply. Now that thought makes me wonder if we should endeavor to meditate more on the Bible.

The Bible, God’s word, is so deep that no matter how much we dig in our lifetime, we never reach the bottom of it—there’s always more to learn—the widow’s oil that didn’t run out, and the five loaves and two fish that fed 5,000 men with more left over than they started with. The Bible never runs out of lessons to teach.

I wonder now if I’m using God’s word as a lamp to my feet. I need to meditate on this.

And here’s another thought to ponder:

What have I set about to do? Some of us set out to simply live on in the place we grew up, doing the things we grew up doing. And some of us choose to get away from all that to follow a new path to see where it leads. Either way though, somewhere deep down we want to look back one day to find our lives have made a difference. Somewhere and in some way, we want to leave meaningful footprints in the sands of time that endure in the world even after our footprints have washed away.

Is the Bible the source of light for the path I have chosen? I need to meditate on this.

So in Bryant Nelson fashion, let’s conclude with a word from the Bible. “Selah!”
“Meditate on this.”

“You are the light of the world,”

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REFLECTIONS

February 27, 2022

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

God at Work

Sometimes things don't go well. Relationships become strained, or money runs tight, or health issues present troublesome challenges. Whatever it is, life sometimes gets us down, and the only thing that we seem to do very well is feel sorry for ourselves.

When we've reached that state of mind maybe it signals the time to walk out the door of the pity party we are attending, look at the world outside, and wonder what God might be doing in our lives. Haven't we been through troubled times before? Haven't those experiences changed us at least a little from what we were before? Might God be preparing us for something new or better in our lives?

Jesus warned us there would be difficult times. And he told us about God pruning unfruitful branches: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.* (See John 15:1-3) Maybe now is a good time to pay attention to God at work in our lives instead of laboring over the pain from our troubles.

"Forget the former things; / do not dwell on the past.

See, I am doing a new thing! / Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

(Isaiah 43:18-19)

"You are the light of the world,"

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REFLECTIONS

February 20, 2022

God is love.

1 John 4:16

Rooted in Love

Roots. They are like transport vessels that carry multitudes of life sustaining ingredients into the far reaches of the lives they serve. For us, the ingredients keep breath pumping from our lungs while chemical transformations magically convert them into energy, intellect, and love. Love is where God lives.

And that's where we want to live too, only evil stands in our way. Lucifer stays busy misdirecting the path we wish to travel, splashing waves that dampen our spirits, and dousing out flames that would warm our hearts.

Our trouble began from one ominous fruit tree in the Garden—the one growing forbidden fruit. Why did God even plant it there? I think God knew there would come a time when we would need help with our perspective. How would we ever know what hot is unless we burn our fingers? And how would we ever learn to yearn for heaven without navigating the troubled waters of life here on earth? We need something to help us understand the importance of love.

So, it took but a single bite of the forbidden fruit to unleash Lucifer's evil spores throughout the world. Now it seems evil's tempting hands are there at every turn to charm us awry.

But if we pause to give notice to God, we find his loving smile enveloping all the world. He is the Master Potter who created all things through Christ Jesus. He planted you and me right where we are today, rooted in his love, and pumping his love to the far reaches of our souls.

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

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. (1 John 4:16-17)

"You are the light of the world,"

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REFLECTIONS

February 13, 2022

**So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;**

Genesis 1:27

Differences

We both chuckled when we saw the looks of a hillbilly watching our car go by from the front porch of the old farmhouse he called home. We found humor from his bib overalls that hid a bulge in his waistline (but not completely) and from the dusty, sweat stained fedora tilted on his head. Though we couldn't tell from the distance, he may have held a toothpick in the corner of his mouth to hold a plug of snuff in his jaw. Then came a sobering thought. "One of God's children," one of us said. Our faces straightened.

We looked upon the man differently then, though nothing about him had changed. He still had the looks of a hillbilly, and the old farmhouse porch had not gained a fresher finish. But the way of life we looked upon felt some way different—one of God's children.

God loves hillbillies too. He made them in his image just as you and me, and he created them with a purpose in mind just as he gave you and me. So, I think we laughed that day because he lived differently from my brother and me.

We were born different—a different place, around different people doing different things. We didn't grow up with farm animals living in our backyard, and chickens pecking for pebbles so their gizzards could grind the seeds their beaks found in the dirt. We grew up differently than that and we paused in our travels for a moment or two to appreciate our hillbilly brother.

God placed him right where we found him. Likely he was born there and taught there to plow the fields, milk the cow, and steal eggs from the chickens' nests every day. His grandmother may have shown him how to churn butter, and to savor the warm buttermilk left over. On Sundays, his mom served fried chicken, and in the summer, he sometimes watched salty sweat drip from his brow while he turned the handle of the ice cream freezer.

My brother and I *do* connect with Sunday fried chicken and the scene with the ice cream handle, but God made us different. God directed the paths our journeys have taken us, shaped us into who we came to be, and in some unexplainable way, what we came to do. And I wonder now, as I relive the scene we found that day, if that man with the hillbilly looks was as amused about our differences as we found humorous about his.

We are God's children too.

"You are the light of the world,"

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REFLECTIONS

February 6, 2022

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Peace and Quiet

Can there be one without the other? I wonder. And where does stillness fit in the picture? Quiet is the absence of sound; but what is peace? The absence of war? It seems to me we are in search of something more than that.

When peace like a river attendeth my way... the hymn begins to its longing melody. Usually, we relate to the image. But I have seen angry rivers too rushing fiercely toward destruction. There is nothing peaceful about them while they are doing it either. So, peace isn't always like a river, though peace is oftentimes found there.

Quiet doesn't always carry peace in its genes either. Quiet before the storm feels unsettling, not comforting. Peace is restful. To say goodbye to a loved one, we say, "Rest in peace." Can one rest, truly rest, without the presence of peace?

Funny isn't it, that when we come near peace and quiet, we do our best to disrupt it. It's not comfortable, at least not at first. But something in the discomfort doesn't wait for peace to settle in. And we revert to the duties of the day still longing for our quick glimpse of the prize to return for a longer stay.

I think when we long for peace in our lives, we are really searching for the peace of God. It is a peace beyond our understanding here in this world. But one day we'll find it.

I think one day a storm of life may carry us through a dark narrow channel barely large enough for our head and shoulders to pass. Breath will be hard to find but the flicker of a light in the distance will signal hope that will push us on. Then as the light beckons us toward it and the suffocating passage nears its end, the struggle through the narrow canal may grow harder still...

Until we are there, basking in Light as never seen before, received by welcoming hands—loving, tender and safe—

And before us flows *the river of the water of life...*³

"You are the light of the world,"

Richard +

³ Revelation 22:1

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REFLECTIONS

January 30, 2022

**Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his.**

Psalms 100:3

Family of God

God made you special. “*Fearfully and wonderfully made,*” the psalmist wrote. You are unique, one of a kind, unlike anyone who lived before or anyone who will ever come into this life after you. Created in the image of God, He made you for a purpose. Have you ever wondered what that purpose is? Here’s a familiar story:

God created man in his own image, / in the image of God he created him; / male and female he created them. / God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:27-28a)

“*Be fruitful,*” God said. And Jesus explained, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last.*” (John 15:16) Might “*fruit that will last*” refer to abundant and beneficial growth in the hearts of people? Luke’s gospel noted that *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.* (Luke 2:52) So, might God’s primary purpose for our lives be to help our children grow in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and mankind?

Fruitfulness is the lifelong assignment God gives us. But He also calls us to “*increase in number.*” Families consist of people closely related by blood or marriage identified as descendants of a common ancestry. So, are we not required to grow our families too?

Fruitfulness evolves from the basic desire to bring new life into the world, nurture it, and help it grow. But what might be the most nurturing lesson to teach?

Moses told the Israelites: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength... Impress [it] on your children.*” (Deuteronomy 6:5, 7) Jesus said, “*Love each other.*” (John 15:17) And Paul told the Corinthians, “*Love never fails.*”

Fill the earth with love. Is there a more lasting fruit than the growth of the family of God, the Maker of us all.

We grow it best when others feel his abounding love in us.

“You are the light of the world,”

Richard +

www.reflectingthesavior.org

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REFLECTIONS

January 23, 2022

**If one falls down, / his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls / and has no one to
help him up!**

**Also, if two lie down together, they will keep
warm. / But how can one keep warm alone?**

Ecclesiastes 4:10-11

Companions

Two men with sad faces walked together toward a place called Emmaus. *They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.*

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (Luke 24:14-17)

Together the two men explained their sadness from the great loss they shared. That's what companions do. That's what companions are. While companions share life experiences together, they are often unaware that they also will come to share a small part of each other's hearts too—a bond only death can break. When one of them passes from this world, a small part of the heart passes away with them. And it hurts—

Joe was a lifelong friend, a companion for much of my life. When he passed from this world, part of my heart went with him. Joe left behind his wife, Cathy, and two sons. Through them some part of Joe continued to live within me. Then Cathy died. With her death a small part of my heart she kept alive died too.

Life is like that isn't it? An important part of life is found in the companions who share our journey. We really don't appreciate them enough—that is, until they are gone.

I am a part of all I that ever met, wrote poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson. And with Joe's passing, and then Cathy, a part of me went with them.

Life is all about love. *"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,* Jesus said. (Matthew 22:37-40) The power and depth of love is never felt more than in times of loss. That's when Jesus wept. But love isn't lost.

Just as Jesus joined the Emmaus travelers, his love lives alongside you and me too. And death can't take it from us. Jesus conquered death.

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

"You are the light of the world,"

Richard +

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REFLECTIONS

January 16, 2022, Refreshed from March 15, 2009

**So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
till the nation avenged itself on its enemies,**

Joshua 10:13

The Day the Earth Stood Still

"Klaatu, barado, nikto." These were the ominous words of instruction to an alien robot in the science fiction movie of 1950's. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was about a large flying saucer that landed in Washington D.C. and its occupants, a robot and the manlike alien that controlled it, could be overcome by the vast power unleashed on them by the United States military. The earth stood still in fear. It had happened once before.

Joshua believed in miracles. He had seen them. He was there when God had parted the Red Sea. He had been fed manna from heaven and issued shoes that lasted forty years. He had seen God hold back the waters of the Jordan River; and he had watched the walls of Jericho crumble before his eyes. He even watched while God rained hail on the five armies waiting to attack his. Joshua believed in miracles; and he prayed for one more. *"O sun, stand still over Gibeon..."* (Josh 10:12) And it did.

After a few frightening days, the alien took his robot and flew away; and the earth resumed life as if nothing had ever happened. But movie goers were left wondering if aliens from outer space existed and what might happen if they found their way to earth. We too may wonder if God caused the sun to stand still over Gibeon, or was that science fiction too?

Joshua believed in miracles. So do I. We haven't seen the sun stand still in the sky like Joshua did; and most likely none of us have seen the waters of a great sea part, or even a small river part to allow a parade of people pass through. My shoes don't last forty years, and the only walls that crumble before me are those I need to stand strong. But miracles happen. I believe they happen every day.

God created the heavens and the earth. He made the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, the forests that grow, and the snow-topped mountains that stand majestically in the distance. He made the sun, the moon, and the stars above. And He created the systems that make everything work orderly together as if the system predated time. I believe in miracles because we have an omnipotent God. He can make the sun stand still or change the world at will. He has. God sent his Son into the world so we may have everlasting life.

And that miracle is enough for me.

"You are the light of the world,"

Richard +

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REFLECTIONS

January 9, 2022

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.

Ecclesiastes 12:8

A Time to Wonder

A new year. For many it is a time for resolution—to take charge of life as if one can control destiny without bother from the wake of unforeseen obstacles that will rear their ugly head. Even fortuitous happenings change the course of life as it's expected it to be. But a new year is also a time of wonder. What will tomorrow bring?

A new year is such a good time for reflection—where am I; and where am I wanting to go. For most of a person's life, New Year resolutions focus on where do we go from here? It's only logical since we can never go back nor even stand still for long. But there does come a day when it's time to consider the legacy we leave more than accomplishments to achieve.

In his book, *The Letter*, one of Richard Paul Evans characters observes, “*From our first babblings to our last word, we make but one statement, and that is our life.*” So, I wonder, what statement *my* is life making? And will that statement convey the message God sent me into the world to leave?

Life is not meaningless unless we choose to direct our lives toward meaningless objectives. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard, writes, “*Meaning is not a luxury for us. It is a kind of spiritual oxygen, we might say, that enables our souls to live. It is a ‘going beyond,’ a transcendence of whatever state we are in toward that which completes it. The meaning of present events in human life is largely a matter of what comes later. Thus, anything that ‘has no future’ is meaningless in the human order.*”⁴

I might describe it this way: By definition, meaning is what one intends to convey; the end, purpose, or significance of something. Meaning is an important driver in a person's life. True meaning endures beyond the long term. Only God endures forever; so meaning must point to God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—the First and the Last.

So I wonder what statement will my life make? We won't know until it's over, or really know until Jesus comes again.

But I pray the statement my life makes conveys the meaning God intended for it.

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⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. Copyright 1997, HarperCollins, San Francisco, page 386.

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REFLECTIONS

December 30, 2021, Refreshed from the Archives of December 30, 2012

...and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Matthew 2:9-10

In Search of Life

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh filled their coffers, intellect packed their minds, and stars directed their destiny. But something was missing. It was life they were in search of, and they looked to the sky for astrological direction to it. One particular star captured their attention, so they set about to see where it led.

Most of us begin a new year with hopeful expectations, with renewed commitments, and with a spirit of wonder for what is yet to come. We attempt to wipe the slate clean and set out with fresh resolutions to lose weight, eat healthier foods, exercise more, be a better friend, husband and father, or wife and mother. But along with those resolutions we also have desires to pursue, and goals to attain in fulfillment of something that is missing. It is in search of life that we choose the paths we take.

The Magi were in search of life too when they chose to follow the star shining before them. Surely they had a picture of the desires they sought for themselves, their families, and others around them. They must have had other choices for the use of their time, other destinations they might seek, other parties to receive their gifts. But the Magi chose to let go of their own desires and follow the hope they found in the star that God had placed before them. They found the strength and endurance to follow its path no matter how long and arduous the journey. It led them to the fullness they had been in search of all along. It led them to the Christ.

As a new year begins, may we too let go of our own desires and follow the hope found in the star that God places before us. May we find the strength and endurance to follow the path no matter how long and arduous the journey. For just as it led the Magi, the path God places before us will lead us to the fullness we have been in search of all along. It will lead to the Christ.

And in Him we find the way, and the truth, and the life.

You are the light of the world,

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