THOUGHTS  OF  APRIL,  2020

1. You have long appreciated that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through the things He suffered [Heb. 2:10], and are still learning to appreciate that He has invited us to follow Him through that same process – Luke 9:23-26.  Notice also that we are to be fruitful all the while [Gal. 5:22-24], letting Him squeeze the ripe juice out of us, not just to be ripe fruit on display.  The display is good and often designed to be obvious to other humans, but the squeezing is much more of a private process.  So, it is not what we gain personally in our ripe beauty, but what comes out of us when we are squeezed.  Right?

Then, when you get two or more together who have been and are yet abiding on the same tree, the product is really tasty to the Lord [Matt. 18:19-20] and to selected humans – John 13:34-35.  The blending is perfect as the Captain, with one project in mind, takes our differences and makes one great spiritual drink of us – John 17:20-24.

1. When our heavenly Father paid the price of His Son for our sake, what did He want in return? There are several answers to that question, aren’t there. Here is one that He gives us: “To freely give us all things” – Rom. 8:32. What a deal! He paid the price and what He wants is to give us more. That’s called redemption. Those “all things” are found in Jesus Christ. Seeking Him, not those things, is the way to plunder the treasure house of heaven.
2. In Matthew 21:18-19 Jesus cursed the fig tree and it died. Why did He curse such a beautiful tree that was in full leaf? Answer: Because it was showing as if it had life, but was not bringing forth fruit. That was a direct allegory, given to teach verse 43, wherein the kingdom of God was to be taken from Israel and given to a people who would produce its fruit – the church, of Jew and Gentile.

Religious people of the Old Testament and New Testament have worked to make religion look good, and hoped that something good would happen inwardly. The opposite is true – work to make the inside good, and the outside good will happen -- Matt. 23:25-26.  It is surprising how we do it backwards and don’t recognize it, even when it is shown to us. Questions: Am I producing fruit or rituals? Are my religious routines serving eternal fruit to the Lord? Is the Lord satisfied with my lovely leaves? Are my efforts producing results for a world that is desperate for spiritual help and reality? How much of my efforts are resulting in just “show,” even if I don’t intend it so?

1. Why are you acceptable to God? Are you sure that it is only because of your faith in Jesus, and not because you are such a wonderful person, full of good works, and better that you were formerly? Let all of those good things continue and increase, but don’t lose sight of the fact that we are acceptable to God only because we are in Jesus – Eph. 1:6. We are secure; we can relax on that point.
2. No, the good Christian life is not one that has no difficulties. You knew that. It is the life that goes through difficulties and comes out better, that is the good life. Paul and Barnabas knew, “We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God” – Acts 14:22(b). That does not say that we must have many tribulations in order to be saved (go to heaven), but does mean that the walk diminishes us in order for Christ to increase in us. That demonstrates we are on the correct path and are indeed carrying our crosses as we head for the kingdom to come. Our daily circumstances and trials are sufficient to get the job done. Just let life flow, accepting the necessary circumstances.
3. It seems that some saints just cannot think of the Lord as a chastiser or spanker of those who will not listen to His voice. Yes, in both Testaments He wrote that He chastises those whom He loves, and that if He does not chastise us, we are illegitimate, meaning “not His children.” Since the Old Testament records the Lord working among His people, and the New Testament records that the things that happened to those Old Testament believers happened for our benefit, and were recorded for our benefit, it seems beneficial that we read such as Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and note the deliberateness and even severity of His chastisement in the lives of those whom He loves. He is Father, He is love, He is faithful, and He does not lie.
4. Paul, writing by the Spirit in Romans 8:1-2, said, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” We still [should] know the difference between sin [nature] and sins [acts], and that our sins affect [only] our functional [not our eternal] relationship with the Lord. Sins [sinnings] cloud our spiritual mindedness and can cause a wobbly walk, but do not affect our blood-bought eternal salvation, from whence we have escaped by being born again through faithful application of Jesus’ shed blood.

Being born into God’s family is a one-time, permanent, God-only, done contract. We are free from the law that said we would die a spiritual separation from God when we sinned [recall Adam and Eve sinned and immediately experienced spiritual death, passing their new sin nature onward to all of us mankind.] As Christians, indeed we should be convicted in our souls when we sin, but there is no condemnation into hell. Our conviction of our sins [sinnings] is to inform and motivate us to repent and correct our actions and their effects on us and others before they darken our spiritual sensitivity. Remember that we could not be good enough to be saved and go to heaven, and now we cannot be bad enough to be condemned and sent to hell.

Instead, we are now under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We are free from death-consequences for our sins. But we do benefit from actions of His fatherly love – conviction, forgiveness, chastisement, and all sorts of heavenly actions designed to draw us out of ourselves and further into Him for Jesus’ sake – by and for whom all things were made and into whom we have been immersed and into whose [complete] likeness we are being made. My, oh, my; just look at God’s self-imposed task in regards to helpless and sinful humanity!

None of this is to imply that we have no further interest in discerning between good and evil [right and wrong], but that the effects of our erroneous actions have changed. We no longer need focus on doing good, and not doing evil, but to pursue our gifted walk in the Spirit Who leads us in the path of righteousness [rightness through faith]. Feeding from the tree of life is deeper and more pleasing to God than mere knowledge of good and evil plus self-effort.

Again, as non-born-again Christians we could never have worked our way out of going to hell and into heaven by being good instead of bad. Neither, as born-again Christians can we fail our way out of heaven and into hell by being bad instead of good.

1. Jesus won the victory, completely and finally. He defeated the devil and all else who/that could hinder His progress toward His ultimate purpose(s) being accomplished. What now is the purpose of the church, His body on earth? In Ephesians 3:10; yes, it is again Paul whom the Lord stretched his holy spiritual and biblically formed imagination to enable him to say, “.. so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

Who are those ruling and authoritative individuals whom the Lord wants us [you, me, and all others of the church] to inform of God’s manifold [varied and numerous] wisdom? They are spiritual persons in the heavenly places, meaning in the air [the first heaven (atmosphere) and second heaven (space)], not in our heavenly-appearing religious earthen buildings. That is one way of looking at our job – making all things about Jesus known to His defeated enemies who have been running about trying to find ways to avoid their coming judgment.

How do we carry out our assignment? How about being light and having truth, engaging in the evangelism that those qualities provide, and bearing their fruit? Being Jesus, living His word by the Spirit? That should be somewhat effective, should it not? Battles are fought and won in the spiritual realm, not in the natural. How is it going?

1. It is almost strange how the Lord wins even when it appears that He has lost, and that He works in that apparently backward way in our lives. The process is designed to deliver us from all self-efforts and self-exaltation, and manifest the same to the world, that only Jesus might be lifted up.

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul said we are to show and be heard as Jesus’ bond-servants. We have Him in us so that the surpassing power of God will be at work, not our human power. For that to happen, we must be afflicted in every way [but we will not be crushed], perplexed [but not despair], persecuted [but not forsaken], struck down [but not destroyed]. In all sorts of ways, we are to show that we are dying [as did Jesus], so that the real life of Jesus can be observed in our lives. That’s called death working in us, but life in others. That was Jesus’ process, and it is our process if we will accept it.

So, Jesus appeared to be losing, but was winning. And we appear to be losing, but are winning. The cross walk is deceptive to those who are deceived [the devil and those who dodge the way of the cross]. The more he tries, the worse he does, and the more he loses in the lives of believers who know and follow the cross-walk.

Therefore, you have noticed that the Lord is often “losing,” even in the most faithful of saints and circumstances. The devil, who has been defeated but not destroyed [we must get that!] already knows that his time is shortening [Rev. 12:12] so things will get worse before they get better and he is not going away quietly. Mankind opened the door to all of this evil, and mankind [Jesus and us] is having to close the door. That is an important part of being in God’s family and becoming like Jesus – kings and priests, reigning with Christ, going after lost sheep in a broken world, bringing down God’s grace. The closing of the door started with our Elder Brother and continues with us!! Imagine that. We are continuing the work of Jesus against the world, the flesh and the devil. Satan is defeated but has not yet been destroyed. Don’t be surprised that he is still active. His time is very short.

1. In another uncommon use of words and life’s situations, those who fear the Lord are happy, blessed and have great delight in His commands. When the Lord told me to give away our home on the hill in the country my heart leapt within me. I recognized His voice, which changed anything in me that could have responded to the contrary. When I told Nancy, she immediately agreed, with joy. When His voice is heard, hearts and worlds change. That is the first part of the fear of the Lord.

The other major part is holding Him in awe, not being flippant or light hearted with Him. Our intimacy with Him does not create shallowness or disrespect. He is a safe fierce lion. Draw near to Him. Enjoy, love and obey Him.

1. If you don’t like spiritual-biblically based jamming [getting together to carefully expand on already solid theology], perhaps you should skip this Thought. Really.

In Matthew 24:32-41 the Lord said His coming at the rapture would be like in the days of Noah [v. 37]. How were the days of Noah? Those people generally believed in a god, some believed in the living God, and some believed sufficiently to worship and obey the living God. There was self-indulgence, all sorts of sinnings, and a general society of unbelief. No difference from today.

But another important thing was going on – the God-created pure gene pool of humanity was becoming rare. Satan’s fallen angels were mating with human women and producing hybrids, called Nephilim, giants, gigantes, Anakites [descendants of Anak], Anakim, Raphaim, Emim, and Titans. The world was becoming more and more sinful and hybrids were becoming more and more numerous. This is what stirred the Lord to send the flood, and why He told Moses and Joshua and other Israelite leaders to kill all of certain tribes in the Promised Land.

But Noah was perfect in his gene pool although apparently one of his daughters-in-law was not, because after the flood there were more giants produced by humans even with the fallen angels no longer sexually active [they were and are being kept in chains until the day of judgement]. So, in the days of Moses and Joshua the Promised Land was heavily populated with Nephilim. That is the reason the Lord told Moses and Joshua to annihilate those peoples, to kill all of them, even their animals [which is a similar topic].

Now, after that dose of biblically based speculation, let’s turn to the genetic altering of today. This is no speculation. All of us know that plants and animals are being genetically altered from those created by God, those which He created and called “good.” Now we are “improving on” the Lord’s good works. It does not appear so bad when we see plants being created that can grow faster and can resist insects and drought, or when defective human genes are changed to produce non-defected humans or animals. But genetic altering has gone far beyond those good-sounding things, into creating slightly or greatly different beings, or humanoids. This is going on with results such as are described in the Book of the Revelation.

At the same time, vaccines are being developed that can prevent sickness from germs like the present coronavirus, some of which are designed to protect us by altering our genes into having greater “natural” resistance. Vaccines commonly cause our bodies to produce antibodies which resist and kill germs, but these new types would cause our bodies to be “naturally” resistant. By changing our genes, they change us into another creature, a germ resistant creature.

We might say, “Sure, why not? Why resist the advance of modern science?” Those who resist would be labeled religious fanatics who then might actually be charged with being responsible for the further spread of diseases, be persecuted and perhaps executed. But the altered-others could be looked at by God and labeled “No longer good.”

It is a Thought that you might want to discard. I understand. But stay tuned to the news.

1. Paul was a good thinker and he taught others to think correctly. As we think, so we become. Many books have been written on the good effects of thinking rightly. Some think that our thoughts change physical things in our brain, forming physical/enzymatic/chemical structures according to our thinking. That may be true. Psalm 46:10 tells us to let go, relax, stop striving, and place our mind on the Lord. And in Proverb 23:7 He says that as we think [reckon in our soul] we are, or we become.

Paul knew and believed and lived and taught God’s truth and how we can live it. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 he said we should destroy our non-godly thoughts and even our lofty ones that raise our thinking up above the Lord’s. We are to take charge of our minds, rejecting anything that is not God’s thinking, and accepting the Christlike ones. In Philippians 4:8 he gave us some help in discerning which thoughts are and are not Christlike. He said, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely [gracious], whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on [ponder] these things.”

We do not reckon for change on something that already is changed, but when something needs to be changed, right? So, when you see your unrighteousness, that is the time to remind yourself of the truth – you are the righteousness of God in Christ – 2 Cor. 5:21. Repent and believe the truth, which leads to your being set free from the well-learned lies that lead to your sinnings. When we remind ourselves of the truth, resume our walk, but sin again [which we do, but less and less often] the thing to do is repent again, reckon the truth again, and resume our faith walk.

When you do that, you are not doing a psychological act on yourself, but doing an act of faith before the Lord. He sees our faithfulness and rewards us for believing Him. We believed contrary to lived-out evidence, not having seen the truth except by faith, so according to His word we are and become like He is. Reckoning produces the fruit of bondages to sin being broken in actual practice. Faith [not self-effort] is the victory.

1. When the Lord speaks, we are “struck” by the hearing of His voice, perhaps also that He showed Himself to us, or that He actually spoke to “me,” or by what He said, or that He perhaps called me by name. The first time A. H. heard the Lord speak to him, the Lord called him by name and said, “I love you.” That was voice, name, and message. The result? Ecstasy. A. H. went about telling everyone the news, but it did not have the same effect on them. In fact, some thought he had lost his marbles. That is similar to my experience, and perhaps to yours.

Question: Why does the second hand word of God have less or no effect on some others, even when it is freshly and zealously spoken? All I can answer is that they are not called, or not yet called. The word has no place to alight in hearts that are not spiritually prepared. At the tomb, Mary saw the risen Jesus and spoke with Him, but until He spoke her name she did not recognize Him. Perhaps in her complete despair and unbelief she was spiritually blind – until He called her by name. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples saw and talked to Him at length but did not recognize Him until He broke bread as they ate together. They, too, were in total unbelief, perhaps until He did that something special and particular to Him – breaking bread as He had at their last supper.

The answer to my question has something to do with our need to have an active and activated faith, if we are to hear the Lord. Unbelief, despair, ignorance and that sort deafen us to higher things of the Lord, leaving us with religion and its practices, leaving us with sickness and death, especially in the more powerful recurrences of church life – 1 Cor. 11:27-32.

1. When you pray, is it your intent to thank and praise the Lord for the blessings that you noticed you received that day? If so, and if you have good spiritual insight, your job is cut out for you – Eph. 1:3. What a day!
2. The epistles were written to clarify things about Jesus Christ and His way that were presented in the gospels. The epistles are wonderful and I deeply appreciate the Spirit’s work through Paul and others. But it seems strange that four well-written testimonies would need to be clarified, especially to groups of christianized people in the church who supposedly have the Spirit who “leads us into all truths,” but those who have the most are often those who need it most. That is shown in the gospels, and again in the epistles. How sad, but that is the Lord’s problem and we are called to be involved.

Jesus of Nazareth in the gospels is revealed as God in the flesh. Known, confessed sinners had little difficulty realizing and appreciating Him, but concealed, unconfessed sinners denied Him. The Samaritan woman [an outsider], the Roman centurion [with a dying servant], the woman caught in adultery, the Syrophoenician woman [not a Jew] – got everything and more than they asked or hoped for. The religious, especially if in leadership, got little or nothing. You have a lot, so be careful of being like them. Too often, being in leadership means maintaining the status quo. That’s not your job. Lead upward into newness and wholeness.

1. Jesus said you and I are the light of the world [maybe He meant “we one body of believers,” not just each one of us individually, because He then compared us to a city on a hill – Matt. 5:14-16.] I usually think good of myself, but not as righteously good as He thinks of me. But He is right. We, the believers, all of us, are the light of the world. It’s not only our shining righteousnesses, but [more exactly] it’s the Lord Jesus in us by His Spirit. He also said He is the light of the world – John 8:12.

At least at times it is easy to think of ourselves as a very dim light, or none at all. There is some sense to that, but we are still lights, even that little nobody who is hidden away in an out of the way place. That person, and every believer, is important in ways that we cannot always perceive. For example, when the rapture comes, if even one believer was left behind, the tribulation could not start. The restraining Holy Spirit, as He was given on the day of Pentecost, must be taken out of the way before the lawless one [the anti-christ] will be unrestrained – 2 Thess. 2:7. As we are now, joined together by our common Spirit in the one body of Christ, we are the only thing preventing the beginning of the end of the world as we know it. Even one saint would be enough to prevent to uninhibited work of the anti-christ. But none will be left behind, and the end will begin.

1. It was terrible, the day that Adam sinned – Gen. 3. I read the Lord’s several questions to Adam, Eve and Satan as being pain and grief laden, like “What have you done?!!!,” not as simple questions from Someone who did not know what had happened.

Yes, the fall of mankind was necessary, because we had to be created sin-able, had to choose God or sin, and after sinning had to be redeemed by the Lord Himself through grace alone. Nothing of all of created humanity was valuable enough to suffice for that redemption. God’s curses against mankind had to be completely satisfied, and Jesus His Son did the job.

When Jesus said “It is finished,” His physical death was not His topic. He meant that mankind’s debt to His Father was paid in full. He had paid the dept of our sins in full. He had accomplished the purpose for which He came – wholly and completely forever. So, let us not cheapen the cost He paid by such as feeling like we have to do anything additional to be forgiven and cleansed. It seems like adding any of our works of righteousness to the price of our redemption is a painful rejection to God of His grace, and a sin.

Yes, we should live faithfully and do good works, but they are expressions of our love and gratitude for the great salvation that He has bestowed on us. On God’s work and word we have confidence that we are forgiven and accepted by the Lord, are saved from any of God’s well-deserved curses, have been restored to full fellowship, are Family, and are destined for heaven to be with Him eternally [and that is only a short list of the Good News!].

1. On your way toward knowing the Lord as really and always being the Lord, how have you settled Proverb 16:4 into your understanding? If you are content and at peace while reading Romans 9, you are doing very well. Nothing exists unless the Lord has made it, and it exists for His purposes and glory. Some [many] of those things and persons are not intent on being for God’s glory, but they still are. He made them and controls them for inclusion in His present and eternal plans.
2. Each body has a mind; one body, one mind. Lord, what a good plan! Anything apart from that is at least double minded, which is not a good condition spiritually on naturally. Double mindedness turns decisions and actions into stalemates or divisiveness. Either nothing can be done, and the body sets still, rotting, or the body separates into two or more parts and all are weakened. That is the picture of life in the Body of Christ as it has existed for all these years – with outstanding exceptions of a continual remnant.

Paul was moved often by the Holy Spirit to write about Christian unity. In Philippians 2 he implored those saints to make his joy complete by being of the same mind, same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. He told them to do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but with humility to regard one another as more important than oneself. He pointed out that this was what was working in Jesus. I mention this, suspecting from personal observation, that unity is the Body of Christ’s weakest point. Our disunity could be shortened into, “We don’t love one another, and we don’t love the Lord.”

How can this be? On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed that His then-current disciples and subsequent disciples would be united like He and His Father in heaven were united, as one – John 17:22-23. What is happening to us!? Perfecting our unity should be a primary effort, at least because of Jesus’ request. We talk about being one with the Lord, not knowing that our disunity as Christians, mirrors our disunity with the Lord. How can we say we love the Lord whom we do not see when we are not loving one another whom we see – 1 John 4:20-21? Our marriages and families show it, our politics show it, our society shows it. The formerly Christian world’s unity is crumbling because the church’s unity has crumbled. Our inaction shows that we are satisfied with things as they are.

Christ’s Body cannot be healthy, much less whole, until and unless that changes. The Body He died to bring into existence has severe injuries, and we do not care. More frankly put, we do not care what the Lord wants; we are going to do things our ways – even while we offer up our beautiful prayers asking for His direction and provision. His words ring clear: “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, when you don’t do what I say?” That’s Luke 6:46, which is personalized for each of us in verses 47-49. The bulk of the Body of Christ is living verse 49 [houses on sand] and thinks it is living verse 48 [houses on rock]. This is not meant to question our basic salvation, but our holy spirituality, our biblicality, and our love for the Lord Jesus and our neighbors.

Let me share a bit of testimony about life in those parts of the Body of Christ who are living verse 48 [whose house is on a rock foundation]. When the Lord reached into my life and snatched me from the jaws of eternal death, immediately I became a new person, in every way. In short time it cost me everything – reputation, job, money, house, but not my wife and kids [because He also snatched my wife and kids].

Immediately He placed me with five other men with whom, for them, their wives and kids, He had done the same thing. We were filled with His life and saw that we were all headed down the same road. We were drawn together. We had our own possessions but eagerly shared them as the Lord had need among us. That group grew as the Lord did the same with others. We were drawn together geographically into one church congregation. Our lives were one. We gifted one another with our houses and cars, shared bank accounts down to the last dollar. There was joy in giving our all, compared to the Israelites joy in giving to build Solomon’s temple. We cared for one another’s families as our own – we were like-minded, one minded and united. We were one. The Lord had the material so He built His house.

We lived the unity that we knew we had with Christ. It was “natural” because we really were a Family. We were one [local] Family or Body of Christ. It was a real and tangible flesh and blood Body of Christ. For years, people came from around the English-speaking world to be part of us in Christ. The Lord did miracles among us like He did in the Bible, in our home lives, on our jobs, in our prayer times, and in our large meetings.

Now that I have sketched that briefly for you, let me give you an outworking of our oneness, a picture of Paul’s teaching of life together from Philippians 2. The Lord led us corporately, usually by starting with His speaking clearly to one of us. It was a daily occasion, involving small and large matters. On what I will call large matters, He would tell me [and usually with a certain brother] to go somewhere around the world, to a large town or a remote village, to a person whom the Lord would perhaps show us that person’s face and tell us about his education, work and soul’s desires, and then tell us when to go. Always, His purpose was for us to have humble fellowship, to share the testimony of our lives together as church, and to invite them into that life. [Always, some came later to America to join with us in that fellowship.]

There was no doubting that it was the Lord Who had spoken to me on those occasions, that I had heard it accurately, and that His message was firm. Next, what to do with that word from God as spoken to me as part of His Body. Of course, take it to my brother elders, those whose lives were equally laid down with mine at the foot of the cross, and easily expect complete agreement and commitment to His word. If not, it would be a “no-go.” [Apply 2 Peter 1:20, as “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.”] But it was always a “go,” usually after some clarifications and prayers. You see, we lived daily by exercising our one mind and other aspects of our unity. The Lord had given us that one mind [it being the one mind of Christ] because we were the Body of His Christ – by His choice, His handiwork, and by our submission to Him and one another. As each body has one mind; so also does Christ. Do you see what we are lacking? Can you taste it? If you taste it, it is at your fingertip. Go for it, no matter the cost.

[At this point it would be good to re-read paragraph two of this Thought 19.]

[IMPORTANT AFTERPOINT: What do I imagine I would have done if we elders had not had perfect unanimity? When I read about those Israelite divisions in the Old Testament, such as in the wilderness with Moses, and in the Promised Land dividing David’s and Solomon’s kingdom, I almost shout at them: “Stop, repent and be healed! God will do it! Then move onward.” At times in that congregation we did exactly that, and the abundant life and power of Christ continued unabated. At later times we went with majority votes and Robert’s Rules of Order, and Death slowly accumulated. In that respect, I would say that we had other things we considered “more important” than to live our oneness, unity, and love for Christ, thus we eventually failed, coming short of His grace for us. Paul saw our unity, lived it [imperfectly, of course], taught it to other believers, including to me, and I am passing it on to you. Take up your crosses together and follow into Christ Jesus. The cost is your self-command; the reward is Jesus’ humility for you and God’s power in the Body.]

1. I like particular types of books and magazines [and TV programs, and people, etc.] so over time I have accumulated particular types of each. They represent what and who I know, but if that is the limit of their usefulness I have not benefitted much from their placement in my life by the Lord. However, those that represent how I have grown or have contributed to the kingdom are very valuable.

[Knowing facts and people does not indicate spiritual growth or value. The devil knows facts and people but it does him no good.]

I have moved many times from city to city, or from house to house within a city, and have often left behind books and people. They have all made their mark on my soul. Some were deep and had immediate effects. Others took time as I either recovered from their effects or had time to digest and appreciate their contribution.

[Knowledge of things or people does not necessarily change us for the better, but should. Facts plus God’s grace avoids a head full of information becoming vanity, instead transforming it into means of revelation.]

1. Why does an apple tree produce apples? Why doesn’t it produce oranges? Because it is an apple tree. It produces the fruit of the kind of tree it is. But it did not produce apples as soon as it became an apple tree. When it was one foot tall, it was already an apple tree. In due time it began to produce its fruit. And it did not become an apple tree when it began producing apples; it produced apples because it was an apple tree. As it grew, it produced much fruit, regularly and in due season.

Be patient with yourself and the Lord’s schedule for you. Unfortunately, some failure is required but forgiven, and grace received, in order to produce the best fruit. Our pride, personal fears, proven inadequacies and record of sins will not be hinderances but fertile ground for our fruitful times ahead.

By watching others, we might get the impression that wisdom comes by time or with more learning, or that patience comes by trying harder and longer, or that humility comes by personal common nature and to only a few. Not so. Fruit is born by abiding in faith through God’s carefully choreographed episodes in each one’s life, especially of our failures – be they short bits of impatience or major failures that devastated you and others. That is not only my personal testimony. I am aware that I’m “preaching to a fruitful choir.”

I will add, for balance, that fruit is also borne by those trials that did not involve our sinning, and by our outright victories without having to first endure. But our failures dig deep and get us further quicker.

1. Remember that those things happened to the Old Testament people of God for our sakes, and the record of happenings were written and kept for our New Testament believers’ sakes – Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11. One of the hundreds of examples is that the sacrifices were placed on the altar each day, dying there. In our New Testament days, we must place ourselves on the altar every day, dying there – Luke 9:23. In doing that, saints of both dispensations please the Lord and receive life.
2. A heads-up reminder for all of us. We have all done things worthy of chastisement, and received chastisement [not punishment, which comes later if not for faith in Jesus] because He chastises those whom He loves. But do not attribute all trials and pains to chastisement. When you have not done something to deserve a chastisement or trial, but you are going through one, the Lord has trusted you with going through the trial righteously.

How to go through non-chastisement trials successfully? Check with the Lord as to the reason for your trial, perhaps also check with your brother or sister who is walking the way of the cross in openness with you, don’t start feeling sorry for yourself, don’t whine, trust the Lord even if you go bankrupt or die.

All of that and more was lived and learned by Job. Job’s test was an example of a believer’s trial without it being punishment or chastisement, but being a test of God’s grace in the life of a saint. Remember Thought No. 22.

1. A life not centered on the Lord is purposeless and meaningless, despite occasional appearances. Without knowing and following the Lord’s purposes in life, there is nothing. “Nothing” is anything not having eternal value. With the Lord as our Everything, there is Life eternal, not only for us but in our works.

It has been observed by some that business people learn their works lessons very quickly. They must be soon successful, or fail in business. But politicians have the luxury of learning them slowly. Why the difference? Politicians are gifted with the tax money of successful business people. The marketplace is an excellent classroom and laboratory.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18 is interpreted a bit differently from translation to translation, but its message is that a poor wise man can deliver a city from danger. The inherent problem when a poor man is wise is that he may be despised and not be listened to. Verse 17 says that fools over-speak wisdom, bringing destruction. This point: Listen closely for quiet wise voices; tune out the loud mouths. Adjusted a bit to our current topic: Pay attention to successful business people, even to a small shop owner.

Pray for our political leaders. One direction of our prayers can be that the Lord will give us more business leaders as politicians. Many of our best politicians, especially during our nation’s early years, have first been successful businessmen; in fact, success in business was an unofficial requirement for public office for many years. Our worst politicians have usually never held a responsible business position. Why have we not noticed that success in business makes for political success, and voted more business people into public office? Instead, we have usually voted for the candidate with the most political experience.

1. How do you recognize when you are in another wilderness situation? In its simplest definition, it is a time of testing. Wilderness times come and go, short and long, intense and easy, lonely and crowded, spiritually dry and spiritually abundant. It boils down to being a time of testing.

When the Israelites were in their wilderness with Moses, they had tremendous leadership [under whom they were tested], lots of fellowship [many people with whom they were tested], and ongoing miracles [each of which put them through tough tests, including daily miracles].

When Jesus was in His wilderness experience, He had no one leading Him [in the natural], no fellowship [in the natural], and no ongoing miracles [in the natural]. But He did have the Holy Spirit directing Him, fellowship with His Father, and was sustained for 40 days as He fasted totally. He had to rely on things spiritual, not physical, as He endued His heavenly assigned and perfectly customized ordeal. Selah.

Isn’t that true for us, also? We have to get foundationally and richly spiritual during our trials, in order to go through them victoriously. Face the situations as they come, no dodging or weaving, “relax” [so there will be no surprises], no falling out of God’s hands, only our dependence upon the smitten Rock who always produces Life no matter our situation. Our brother Job knew that. Times of testing are tests of the Lord’s faithfulness, of His ability to keep us in all situations. He does.

Relax, take a deep breath. Possess the lion’s den, the pursuit of Pharaoh, the overwhelming enemy forces, the stormy sea, the death of a beloved [you knew I would get around to Nancy, didn’t you]. The Lord is only good.

1. My final Thought for the month. Most of you know that my Nancy went HOME to be with the Lord on April 15th. Blessed be the name of the Lord.