THOUGHTS OF JANUARY, 2016

1. “Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.” – Aldous Huxley [1894-1963], English writer, novelist, philosopher, but not a very good model of righteousness. That quote is an example of how we are often called upon to simplify and clarify for others that which they already know. Jesus did that, and you do, too. Life and Christianity are simple and straight forward. Little children can understand faith and truth because faith works best in an as-yet-uncluttered imagination, and truth is clear and simple and integrates well with kids for thought and action. It also unclutters the mind.

2. In the earliest years of our spiritual walk with the Lord we had very childlike thinking and therefore childlike actions and lives. By that I mean we were faithful to live scripturally. At the same time we carried on in our professions and businesses. That was right-on, appropriate, biblical, and was an effective and necessary setting for the Lord to establish/ground/found us in Him early-on. That is not meant to question one’s basic salvation if they have not been similarly impacted. It is a testimony, and perhaps more than a testimony, that the sudden impact of the Real Thing on human carnality produced amazing and full-life transformational results. Then, as growth occurred [not meaning here to imply that spiritual growth always follows], faith ripened along with spiritual maturity. The Lord found us faithful as little ones in our little ways, and gave us bigger things as He grew us up. Thanks, BGW, for stirring that Thought and memory.

3. Europe is dying, in all ways. It is over for them.

1) The quality and quantity of believers’ spiritual life is far down. Christianity, which produced Europe’s enlightenment and life, has been openly rejected and is threatened with eradication on the continent. Britain is trying to hold on but appears to be declining only at a slower rate. Church attendance is down and their buildings are closing. Christian and Jewish biblical practices are being outlawed. Jews are escaping back to Israel.

2) Europe’s population percentage of the world is down from 20% of the world’s population in 1915 to 7% today. That’s a share decrease of 2/3 in one century, during which time Europe usually had better food and health care than did the rest of the world.

3) National identity and character has faded, having refused to protect its borders, abandoned its morals and culture, and denied itself only self-restraint.

4) Their mental health is a national suicide in progress. They no longer think of themselves as a special people. They are self-loathing and hate their heritage. Their bureaucracy is actually managing their decline, after having decided to do nothing about its fatal illness. Their mindset: Why do anything about all this mess when there is nothing worth preserving?

5) There is no unity. It is not evident to them that more regulations will not produce solidarity.

Europe has become a very small place. In the shrinking process, Europe has had no principled objection to those who took over their nations because tolerance, pluralism, human rights, non-judgmentalism, and multi-cultural policies were more important than assimilation into its now formerly Christian culture. Europe’s decline shows again that there are many things that cannot be outsourced to a welfare state. People are not simply material beings. We are bodies and souls, with a life-giving spirit that must be nourished from above and by others of the faith.

Just like Communism was blind to the essentials of human nature, so is the brand of humanism that has overtaken Europe and that is eroding America. As was ancient Israel when they abandoned faithful obedience to their God, Europe was a push-over for another religion to come along and take over, as Islam is doing.

But perhaps Thought No. 4 is for them.

4. “Failure is a bruise, not a tattoo.” – John Sinclair [1941-present], American poet, writer, and social activist. Determining your answers to these questions could heal your bruise: What was your biggest failure in 2015, why did you fail, and how did you handle the failure? How did others handle it? Why will you not repeat it this year, perhaps in some other area of your life?

5. The Lord continues fulfilling His word to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; and Acts 3:25. Israel is a world leader in electronics. For example, they buy the most advanced military equipment from the United States [planes, rocketry] and modify them upward. They even share some of their advances with the United States.

Israel has long shared with other nations their innovative systems of fruit and vegetable production. Now Israel is teaching more nations its milk production methods. The recently founded state of South Sudan was looking for ways to diversify its heavily oil-dependent economy, so an Israeli firm shared plans and designs for a $600 million dairy farming project. The funding is through interests in India and is scheduled to have over 10,000 cows producing milk in 5 adjacent facilities, making it the largest operation of its kind on the African continent. The infrastructural designs are based on the experience of Israeli dairy farmers who are producing enough milk to supply the needs of their own nation plus large quantities for export, prompting countries around the world, like South Sudan, to ask for assistance in setting up similar operations.

The Lord God is faithful. He has had a well-studied plan for Abraham’s descendants from before the beginning and is completing it.

6. My prayers have always been short, whether the prayers were for me or for another, such as for a patient. The subject and object were there, and I usually went straight to the heart of the matter. It would have been unusual if at first I had to lay groundwork for the prayer, such as repenting, before moving to the central topic. When repentance is an integral part of our life style we don’t have to start officially with repentance in our prayers, unless the Lord inserts the need. Besides, God measures prayer by weight, not by length.

There is no scheme or outline or method that can be learned and followed, that will automatically bring the presence and power of the government of the kingdom of heaven into an earthly situation. It is an abiding in Him and an abiding of His word in us. That’s as close to a formula that I can offer.

7. This Thought is from my Teacher’s Notes of our 1-9-16 Saturday Evening Bible Study. For a couple of weeks we had been reviewing 2015 and peeking into 2016. We are a spiritually-alive and comfortable-together, increasingly-humble group of disciples who are becoming a unit [John 17]. An awareness of the Lord’s all-mightiness is increasing among us, helping free us to be obedient and to love one another. I think we are beginning to abide [John 15].

We started with this FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENT for the evening: The Lord is all-mighty. His love is overpowering. He has placed Himself within each of us who are here tonight. We are among the eternally redeemed. We live, eat, work, drive, and sleep in His presence. He continually reveals Himself to us and increases our capacity to know and trust Him. He is totally just, which helps motivate us to honor Him. He is completely forgiving as we stay honest with Him. He has done what is necessary for us to appropriate all that He is offering humanity at this time. He makes sheep and He makes shepherds, and He puts them together in recognizable, functional relationships. All of us are our brothers’ keepers.

Then we got specific with TONIGHT’S PREFACE: Again I want to talk to us about our past, present, and future. This year, 2016, will be a year in which we will give glory to God. The “us” and “we” are those who give and receive Life, especially in this particular meeting of saints. God’s glory is that of God which He and we make obvious to the world, and which then the world must deal with. Remember that the One who made God’s glory most obvious was murdered by the world. So, when I think of giving glory to God I think of the process and cost necessary for us to join Him in showing God’s glory. It requires our going faithfully through the Lord’s carefully customized trials for us. I recall that in 2015 we were given three essential aspects for going forward: 1) individually, keeping our peace, 2) corporately, loving one another, and 3) as one, turning to and engaging the world. The Lord will then do what He wants, meaning He will give our world a revelation of Himself and will build us up as we head for our time in glory.

Almost as an aside [but pertinent] series of thoughts, we then grazed our way through these Questions:

1. How high on your priority list is the understanding of past history, including your past history? Our personal past histories are already stored in the Library of Heaven and are available for our daily study. The Holy Spirit is Chief Librarian, but loving and unloving saints will be glad to help us dig them out. They are not only filed there for review on the judgment day. Is knowing and studying them valuable to you? Tell us how you act upon that priority item. Have you been going to the Lord, your friends, and your enemies for personal insights?

2. How high on your priority list is the understanding of that which is going on in the world now, including in your life? We are being taped right now. Every thought, action and word is being recorded. Do you give much attention to that? Why your “yes” or “no?” My answer is “no, not much.”

3. How high on your priority list is the knowledge of future history, including your future history? Our future histories are already known to God and partly known to those who will listen to Him, and certainly can be of present valuable to us. Tell us how you act upon that priority item. Have you been going to the Lord, your friends, your prophet friend who knows your soul, and your enemies for insights into your future?

Don’t let that last question scare you off, because everyone studies the past and knows the future to some extent; even atheists. Examples:

 “If you continue doing well you are going to get that scholarship.”

 “If you continue driving like that you are going to get a ticket.”

 “If you don’t do something about your laziness you will amount to nothing.”

 “If you give your shirt to that person who stole your coat you will: 1) freeze, 2) please the

 Lord, 3) both, 4) neither.

So you know that everyone presumes themselves be a sort-of prophet who possesses some amount of expertise. But there are those whom the Lord has called forth, to stand before Him, to exercise their natural and spiritual insightfulness in their anointing as His prophet. Those are the ones who we can depend on for a futuristic word from God’s throne.

Then we needed an honest evaluation of “this present world,” as in 1 Corinthians 7:31 and 1 John 2:17. OUR EVALUATION [but be careful; avoid the development of an attitude]: The world is dying. The worldly church is dying. That church is identifiable by its unbiblical stance and unholy spirit. It accepts the world’s new definitions for words like tolerance, pluralism, human rights, and non-judgmentalism. It also accepts the world’s laws for itself. As always, God preserves a remnant of faithful believers among the ruins.

 With all of the above as preparation, we were ready to consider a meaningful dream I had that week. It addressed our past, present, and future. As I was awakening from this dream I realized that I had also dreamed it 1 or 2 nights previously.

I was with a small flock of sheep, probably about 6 or so. The sheep were not the focus in this dream. We were resting in a pasture in the shade of a large tree. Out in the open, in the grassy pasture about 50 yards away I noticed 3 white wolves. Throughout the dream 2 of the 3 stayed close to one another, and the third stayed a bit apart from them, such as about 15 feet apart. The wolves were self-engaged, meaning they were not apparently involved with or aware of the flock and me.

I knew the wolves were an always present threat to the flock, and because of their proximity I decided to initiate an encounter with them. I had no staff or rod or shepherd’s crook. I walked toward them and they slowly became aware of me. They did not run and did not get obviously mean or snarl. But they did begin to slowly circle me and became increasingly menacing and close up. I struck out and hit one on his nose, which did not change anything of the situation – did not intensify the low-key fight or end it. The dream ended.

The only difference in this dream and the same dream previously is that in the first dream I had more actively engaged the wolves. We had quite a fight in the first dream, which ended during the fight.

Understanding the dream:

The first dream indicated that a fight is in progress; the second dream indicated less intense fighting but that the problem persists and requires further vigilance and engagement. Having no typical shepherd’s weapon indicates that no formal titles or offices are necessary; only a spiritual appointment and spiritual weapons [love and action].

The sheep are at rest in the shade of a tree in a field of good food. The shepherd battles with the white wolves [deceiving shepherds] who would injure the sheep, although they do not appear to be dangerous. There is no immediate danger from those wolves but the wolves are always nearby and require occasional battle by alert shepherds.

Application of the dream: 1) In the past few years everyone in the group had been drawn close together, delivered from distresses, settled more comfortably in the Lord, and become faithful and productive. 2) We have been keeping our peace, loving one another, and the Lord has been doing with us as He pleases. 3) Shepherds and sheep have a heart relationship, and we enjoy that. 4) The dream applies to us [past, present, and future] and applies generally to other shepherds and flocks. 5) There are designated shepherds of flocks, but every believer is active as his brother’s keeper.

Some attesting verses in regards to sheep and shepherds:

1. Numbers 27:17 – God’s shepherds lead sheep daily in all sorts of ways. [That cannot be done enmass

 in-depth by contact one hour weekly.]

2. Jeremiah 3:15 – God’s shepherds have God’s heart for the sheep. [They are not for hire and are not

 led by their sheep.]

3. Ezekiel 34:1-10 – Some results from having bad shepherds. [Is ignorance a successful plea?]

4. Matthew 9:36 – Shepherdless sheep are distressed and dispirited. [Look about you.]

To be shepherds of Jesus’ flocks:

1. 2 Samuel 5:2 – Do as David did when Saul was still the official shepherd [king] of Israel. He

 shepherded with great results, without official authority.

2. Matthew 2:6 – It is often necessary, as with Jesus, for us to be lowly-born shepherds without official

 status.

3. John 21:16 – Feed the sheep through love for the Great Shepherd. When our love/concern for the

 sheep exceeds our love/concern for our Great Shepherd, we begin to fail Him and them.

4. Acts 20:25-30 – Paul’s word to the shepherds [elders] of Ephesus. All of them were not official

 shepherds of that flock, but all were responsible as their brothers’ keepers.

8. Baltasar Gracian [1601-1658], Spanish Catholic priest, writer and moral philosopher, said “Never contend with a man who has nothing to lose.” That speaks of Jesus, and of those who take up their crosses daily and follow Him. Where ever a group of those cross-bearers is found there is a presentation of the body of Christ that the world must contend with, must respond to in some way, and cannot be ignored. Paying the cost is quite faithful, but illogical.

To the degree that the church has something to lose, it will interact with the world and compromise to protect itself. Self-preservation is quite logical, but unfaithful.

9. Once again the world is loaded with wars and rumors of wars. It is probably accurate to add to that word from Jesus such as, “terrorism and rumors of terrorism.” Have you taken time to notice how much our lives have been changed in the past 15 years by terrorism and rumors of terrorism? Those changes are in every part of our lives – banking, travel of all sorts, social and sports events, military tactics, missionary efforts, education, etc. When our ways drift from the Lord’s ways, threats change and drain us. That which we fear comes upon us, even if it doesn’t.

10. Hospitality, a requirement for leadership in the church [1 Timothy 3:2], can be described as the opening of one’s life so that others can walk into it to the depth of God’s grace and extent of their need. That includes personally, home life, financially, time, place, etc. Being hospitable as modeled for us in and out of Scripture calls us to open up and receive others as the Lord has received us. Can you imagine: God’s life and His “home” will never again be the same when we get there, and we are already within the gate. He will continue working on us, but we are far from being Mathew 5:48. That’s hospitality.

Then there is the matter of availability, which can be described as mobile hospitality. Abraham was available [Genesis 12:1-4], David was available [1 Samuel 22:1-2], and Ananias was available [Acts 9:10-19]. Biggest of all, Jesus, God’s Son, was available.

11. There are many ways to say it: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going,” “The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win,” and “So if you are suffering according to God’s will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to God who made you for He will never fail you.” The first is from one or more suggested sources; the second is from Roger Banister [1929-present], English physician, academic, the first to run the sub-four-minute mile; and the third is from the Holy Spirit via Peter.

12. In June of 2015 an already bright object flared up in the sky. It is thought to have been a supernova, a cosmic explosion, probably a star exploding at its center. To simplify, it was a black hole tearing a star apart [definitely not my simplification]. It was 200 times brighter than the average supernova, 570 billion times brighter than our sun, and 20 times brighter than all the stars in our Milky Way galaxy combined – even though it is only 10 miles in diameter. That’s concentrated brilliance, is it not? Although it was seen in June, it happened some time back because it is [or was] 3.8 billion light years away from us. During the first four months since its discovery it has released as much radiation energy as our sun would release in 90 billion years of shining. The explosion is gradually fading.

Enjoy with me some expansive, directed-at-Jesus thinking. Jesus created all of creation by speaking it into existence, holds it in existence by His direct and purposeful will, adjusts it to suit His on-going plans as it pleases Him, and will put an end to all or part of it in His own time. That supernova occurred from a thought of Jesus, as did that hair that came out of your head today. It had served its purpose in its previous state and was changed to fit its future purpose. Each of us, and the church united, are in a similar process.

Just as Jesus did not create humanity and tell us to go out there and be good, He did not create the rest of creation and turn it over to itself. He has been the Master Architect from before the beginning, is the Head Foreman overseeing every detail of the job, is the Master Craftsman at work on every item, and is soon to be the Receiver of His paid for but unfinished product. All was planned. All is being brooded over as a mother hen broods over her chicks. All will be completed and be presented to Him in His glory. We will be there.

That new supernova is not a candle compared to the brightness of Jesus. I thank God that His brilliance is greatly hidden from us at this time, and is being gradually revealed as He prepares us for seeing Him face-to-face in His fullness. That supernova is gradually fading and will pass away, but nothing of the Lord [of Him in and of Himself, or of Him in us] will pass away.

Saints, our outlook is bright. That’s our State of the Kingdom report for today.

13. While keeping your eyes on China’s economy, military, and other important areas, watch their slowly evolving healthy political growth. It has been many years since imprisonment and death were common punishments for being a Christian in China. These days, punishment for Christians is reserved for those who are not in congregations registered with and controlled by the government. That relief is most helpful in the spread of the gospel, although its down-side is that the lack of persecution has caused some believers to become lukewarm. That scale-back of Communist Party control of life in China also affects other areas, such as in the weakening of government power in domestic issues. Freedom, being a gift with God’s purposes attached, has a way of infiltrating everything. The developing free market is increasingly healthy and very enjoyable to all, while the dwindling system of government control is disliked and obviously failing. Result: The free market is accelerating. China is half-way through free market pregnancy and cannot stop itself – except by an abortion by revolution. All of this Thought is a simplification of a complex situation, but freedom is at hand in China and many are grasping it. As mentioned before, freedom will allow for more Christians but the quality of spiritual life will suffer.

14. God’s guidance comes in several ways. In two, we can await our orders or we can act upon what we know are His heart-felt desires. Both are commendable. Isaiah [6:8] overheard the Lord asking a group question; “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Isaiah, being there, quickly answer, “Here am I. Send me.” The Lord was pleased to have such a responsive servant, and sent him to do His business.

On many other occasions the Lord commanded His servants to do certain things, and they obeyed His commands. It is the Lord’s choice as to which way to instruct each of us, and the hear-ability of our souls is His workmanship, but I suspect that He especially likes our responses when we act according to His desires, without His having to give us commands. Perhaps that shows a difference in attitudes, or of love, or of personal intimacy.

Nancy appreciates my helpfulnesses more when I do them because I know what she wants, than when I do them after she asks. Both are appreciated.

15. Jesus died for our sins. I think that Christianity has a good grasp on that. His substitutionary death has had radical consequences in our lives. We know the truth and we believe that He was “.. delivered up for our trespasses ...” – Rom. 4:25. Praise the Lord!

But also, Jesus rose from the dead. Have you grabbed hold of that to your satisfaction? What are the consequences of His resurrection in your life such as its effect on your marriage, family, job, church involvement, daily errands, sleep and driving habits, and social obligations? He was “.. raised for our justification.” – ib. id. More praises to Jesus! How are we justified by His resurrection? Being justified means being judged now and forever by God as if having never sinned. That fresh “justification by faith” gives us standing before God and a new life now and forever.

Compare that new, hidden life in Christ to the new, hidden life in the United States Federal Witness Protection Program. In the U. S program the protected witness worked himself out of a prison sentence by bearing witness against another criminal, but in God’s justification program we are both the criminal and the witness against ourselves through confession to the Judge. The one in the U. S. program leads a life of fear; the one in God’s program is free of guilt and fear.

When we agree with the Lord that we are new creatures we begin to show the reality of that freedom.

16. [A HEAVILY BORROWED THOUGHT]: A researcher began conducting experiments to determine what might get children to eat the vegetables they hated. She tried everything. She bribed them with ice cream. She lectured them about how healthy the vegetables were for them. She even challenged them to be good role models. None of it worked.

Then she discovered the one technique that worked every time. She put a child who hated peas at a table with other children who loved peas. Within a few mealtimes, the pea-hating child started eating peas. Culture had prevailed. The peas tasted no differently, but the pea-hating child was changed by an environment filled with pea-love. That’s all it took.

Culture is a powerful force, yet it is surprisingly simple to define. Culture is simply “what is encouraged to grow.” This leads us to a very important leadership truth. Great leaders build great cultures. Some people think that a leader is the lone figure at the front of the crowd shouting, “Onward!” That comes second. What comes first is that this leader has already grown a culture of encouragement, skill, courage, passion, knowledge, self-sacrifice, discipline, and loyalty. Only with this culture thriving can the leader then launch an army to victory with a single word.

Nearly everything can be seen in terms of culture—marriages, leadership, organizations, friendships, movies, even furniture and art in a home. We constantly ask ourselves the “culture questions.” What is encouraged to grow? What thrives in that environment? What is deposited in the soul like a seed? What takes root from the time spent there?

The truth is that culture is the ultimate measure of nearly everything. By what is said, by what is put on the walls, by what is rewarded, by the buzzwords you craft, by the values you embody, by what and who you promote—by these and a thousand other things—you build a culture. Then your culture builds your success.

Let’s get practical. Take some time over the next few days to look at the culture of three things in your life—your friendships, your marriage and/or home, and your leadership role(s). Be tough with yourself. Ask others to be brutally honest. The big question is, “What am I growing around me?”

Frankly, this is one of the most important issues of your life. It is the issue of your leadership. Unfortunately, most leaders never pause to take stock of the culture they inherently build. Now you can, and you should know that this exercise has changed lives and built entire companies and brands. Don’t rush this.

17. After wandering far off course in life, it can be difficult or impossible to find one’s way back on course. When I was in that condition the Lord offered me new life -- His life. I responded not by trying to find my way back to the highway, but by repenting of where I was and left everything of where I was and how I was. That put me on the highway. That example may be only one way of how to find the highway but I have noticed that many others have tried to make their own way back to the highway but got distracted, involved, and lost. There are many routes to take, ways that offer attractions and improvements, but not all lead to The Way. Doing the best and most possible at any moment puts you in good position for the next moment, but detours and sightseeing can lead to dead ends.

18. “If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters.” – Colin Powell [1937-present], American military leader and statesman, Episcopalian. If we will be found faithful in small things we will be given greater things.

19. “The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.” – Fredrich Nietzsche [1844-1900], German philosopher, poet, scholar. It requires a lot of parents and other teachers for them to teach others to respect and even admire those who think differently, look differently, walk differently, eat differently, etc. Yet, we must teach others to not hold in high esteem those who are of poor character.

20. Mercy is not on some higher level than justice, nor on a lower level. They are equals, and neither is of value without the other. [There must be a word or term for that sort of different but equal relationship. Perhaps it’s “spouse.”]

By virtue of our existence we are in community – with God, with one another and, in a way, with all creation. There is no way to exist without being in our communities, even when we die this earth-death.

One of the aspects of being in community is that we are in a continual state of danger, more than we usually realize. Some withdraw from some forms of their communities because of those dangers. Considering the simply natural, statistics show that a drive home from work or a day at home is loaded with danger. Of course, few of us Westerners live with an active awareness of our dangers, but they are there. Many people around the world do live aware of their constant dangers.

The “only spiritual” dangers are there, also. Our souls were sought by the Holy Spirit and by the evil one. After we were permanently acquired by the Holy Spirit the devil continued his pursuit and at times intensified his pursuit, as you have noticed.

Although danger is a permanent part of this earth-life, fear need not be a part. Fear has lost its inevitable grip on us because of our confidence in God’s powerful abiding presence. By virtue of even a small bit of memory, we can testify to having heard many times our local rendering of “Peace be unto you,” with an immediate follow-up dose of the peace of God as it exceeded our understanding.

21. Sin and a Christian are incompatible. They do meet, and occasionally travel together for a time, but if they attempt to live together there is disharmony. Those attempts cause “heart trouble,” because the Holy Spirit already and permanently lives there. Heart ache is the best proof that the Holy Spirit is already there. At that point, any attempt to self-manufacture God’s grace, so we will be comfortable in sin, will fail. God’s grace never encourages or allows us to live comfortably in sin.

The deceiver has ways of trying to make us comfortable with remaining in our sin, but only the Holy Comforter can make us truly comfortable. He whispers the truth to us and sets us free upon our full agreement with Him. Otherwise we are on the road to deception.

22. Whether we know it or like it or not, we are a light on a hill. We have been place there by the One who lit us up. Of course, we know that means we are to shine brightly in a dark world for the sake of others and to show Jesus, but don’t forget that, because we have been put up here, we are here so that we can be seen by everyone. Our observers’ question is, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” Our observers are both Christians and non-Christians. It is a blessing to find that well-established Christians are still seeking the answer to that question, still finding answers, and still growing.

23. When you were elected to a position by your peers -- in school, at work, in the public square – you owed your election to them [knowing that the Lord was behind it]. But once you were installed in that office, you became responsible only to God. That is a difficult stance for many politicians who are tempted to put their constituents above God, due to a greater sense of duty to them than to God. That choice may change the results of your next election but it is a good way to become confident about who/Who really put you into office.

Marriage is a good example of that process. If humanity/the flesh/hormones/etc. brought you together [hoping that the Lord was behind it??], and you belatedly wonder about your motivation, start doing your marriage as unto the Lord. Be responsible to Him, not to your spouse. That may take some patience, stumbling, wisdom, forgiveness, and outside help but is worth the effort.

All voluntary, elected, free-will relationships gain from the effort of being done as unto the Lord. That “as unto” means doing to the other(s) according to His word and feeling toward the other(s) as He feels toward them. Just thinking about the associated soul-costs makes my flesh sweat inside, but it is being worth the price to me and will be to you.

24. America’s culture is still markedly Christian, at least compared to cultures that are totally non-Christian. That is both a sad and a glad statement.

One part of our culture that I have been fortunate to be part of is the medical field. I graduated from medical school in 1960 after an interlude of 5 years work in industry and enjoying marriage and family. Being a doctor in the 1960s and 1970s gave me the opportunity to observe the gradual slide of American physicians and their medical care from among the world’s most heart-felt, freest and best to its present level. Lots more to say there in several directions, but what I want to point out is that in medicine everyone is now becoming a number, but not simply given a number.

Being a number is more than impersonal; it’s dangerous because it puts us in a group where we no longer get personalized care. For example, it has been reported recently that 150,000 American seniors received “unnecessary” breast or prostate cancer screenings, costing 1.2 billion dollars per year. I hope you noticed there that the granting of medical care is becoming a matter of chronological age and government dollars, not a matter of the physician’s and patient’s deliberations.

But there is more. Those “unnecessary” screenings are “not recommended” [soon to read “not allowed”] for people with less than 10 years of life expectancy. Life expectancy is a smoky, impersonal scientific calculation. Over 20 years ago Nancy was given a life expectancy of 20 to 40 months, with treatment! If the average life expectancy in a group of patients is estimated to be something like 10 years, their actual range of life would be something like from 5 to 15 years – some dying even quicker and some living longer than that estimated range. In that group, those who would have actually lived for 15 or more years certainly would have appreciated better care, but were denied it because they were evaluated as a statistic.

Be informed and be diligent but don’t fear.

25. This Thought deals only with the Lord’s speaking to us directly and personally and how we know it is His voice. This is not about the other ways He communicates with us. So, how do you know when it is the Lord who is speaking to you? Yes, sometimes His powerful, graceful voice leaves us with no doubt. But other times we recognize the thought that came into our minds as being from Him because it lacks a sense of our own initiation, and it flows through our thoughts with its own inertia. Then there is the effect it has on our souls and how it compares with the other times we heard Him.

26. In our Bible Study Group we often remind one another to keep our hands off of others’ souls, meaning “don’t try to change others.” We do play important roles in others’ lives for the purpose of their being changed, but we are not their soul changers.

The Lord is the only one who can change souls, including our own. We can modify our behavior for a time when we are adequately motivated to do so, but we cannot change even our own souls. In respect to our own soul’s change, we can repent and humble ourselves before God and man, and He will change us inside. That inner change will show outwardly.

But about others’ souls: Keep our hands off of them. Pray for them, properly call attention to their need of change, comfort them, teach and model for them, and when necessary properly afflict them. But don’t put your hands on their souls, meaning don’t press others to change.

The Lord is building His house. He selects His material and modifies it Himself. Then His material fits location and function. It fits into His blueprint when and how He wants. He places us in His body where we should be, and He makes no mistakes.

Remember that in the Old Testament the Lord had His people select stones to build altars to Him in various places. His instructions were 1) select the stones, 2) don’t put a tool to them, 3) place them in proper relationship to one another, 4) put plaster on them, on which the words of God were written. What a helpful allegory to help us keep our hands off one another, but to apply His word to one another.

See Exodus 20:24-25, Deuteronomy 27:1-8, 1 Samuel 17:40, 49, and 1 Peter 2:4-5. Peter pointed out that now we are those stones, prepared by God’s hand.

27. Sometimes we have difficulty hearing the Lord, especially when He whispers something contrary to His usual, or when it is contrary to our desires or habits. The point here is that if you have been unable to distinguish the Lord’s directions on how to lead-off a meeting, or a ministry, or whatever, relax your SOP [standard operating procedure] and listen for the unusual. Read 1 Kings 20:13-21 and note the very unusual order of battle. Ahab was a very poor king, but the Lord used him anyway. Perhaps He will do the same for even us, especially if we will loosen our plans and expectations.

28. Choose as your friend: Either the man who makes frequent mistakes but knows the joy of repentance, or the man who seldom makes mistakes but sees little need for repentance.

29. When Jesus returns to earth, why will He set foot first on the Mount of Olives, cross the Kidron Valley [perhaps a 5 minute walk], and enter Jerusalem via the currently walled-off East Gate?

From Ezekiel chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 we are shown why the Holy Spirit left Jerusalem, left the temple, then left the earth from the Mount of Olives. The trail He blazed while departing is well marked. The returning Redeemer will follow that same trail, but will travel in the opposite direction.

But the East Gate has been sealed with large stones for centuries by the Muslims. And the hillside approach to the East Gate has long been a massive graveyard for Muslims. Both of those actions were for the purpose of stopping the Jewish-Christian Messiah’s prophesied re-entry. Yes, He will touch down on the Mount of Olives, cross the Kidron Valley, and re-enter Jerusalem via the East Gate. Muslims knew that the Jews become ritually unclean if they walk on or otherwise touch dead bodies, which is why they buried their dead at the approach to the East Gate and sealed the Gate.

Have you ever tried to block something God said He was going to do?

30. America was founded on several issues of freedom, one of which was religious freedom, or toleration. It was established that whatever one person believed had no bearing whatsoever on another person as long as those beliefs did not prompt the person to harm another. It was fine for a person to want his beliefs to be believed by his neighbors. And teaching one’s religious beliefs as much as one wanted was fine, as was the use of common persuasion. But no one had the right to employ any form of power, including of the state, to force anyone to conform to another’s views.

Forbidding the power of the state was a new idea, which was the main reason our early settlers fled Europe. Furthermore, if anyone had faith in their ideas, it was agreed that they should have faith in those ideas to change others rather than relying upon any form of force. That one idea took the government out of people’s lives more than any other principle in history. Government, not religion, was reduced by our religious laws.

Now to today: Religious freedom has been redefined as freedom from religion, which is an intolerant position. Intolerance says that religion has no place in the public square. It must not be seen or heard so as not to be imposed upon others. In that situation, the non-religious person has the right to suppress any public expression of religion. Furthermore, internal religious beliefs and living by them are punished by loss of job and by fines. Once again, the force of the state is being used to suppress religion, not to protect its free exercise.

31. The Lord is still working on us in Corpus Christi to deliver us of our haughtiness that won’t be humbled, hurts that won’t be healed, and control that won’t be relinquished. In their place He is building Coram Deo: The essence of the Christian life, meaning living all of one’s life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and to the glory of God. The tide is slowly rising.

A-dios.