THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2019

1. Many nations seem to be working to establish their dominion over other nations, all with varying degrees of righteousness and based on their own value system. There is one nation, called the kingdom of God, that is doing the same thing, but with total righteousness which is also based on its own value system. That kingdom seeks only the interests of its King. Unfortunately, still being humans, many of its citizens seek other interests, principally their own, but within this kingdom is a remnant who have seen the glory of their King and want only His interests. They know He deserves that and all of that. His is the kingdom and the power and the glory now and forever, and He, the Most High, rules in the kingdoms of men – Daniel 4:17.
2. The authors of the American constitution believed that a moral standard is essential to the success of a self-governed nation. They knew human will, and they knew the need of a moral restraint upon that powerful and potentially evil force, especially as a society. [Even though this Thought is about large cultures and nations, this also applies to individuals, families, corporations, etc.]

When there is not a commonly accepted moral standard, the powers that be will turn to something else to forcibly apply restraints, that usually being some form and degree of tyranny. Occasionally the turn is in the other direction, to some degree of unbridled anarchy. In either case, it will be an assault against religion and established values. Religious basics must be abolished, laws changed to match the new standards, the secular mind is set free and, you guessed it, the new secular project becomes its own preferred religion.

But the new secular moral standard is not neutral. Like the pilgrims who fled Europe due to religious persecution, our new colonial government wrestled with doing the same [to a lesser degree] here in the new nation. Government-preferred religion is always lurking in the darkness of the kingdom of this world. Its ultimate religion is godless totalitarianism.

In the interval between our present condition of infantile human life in God’s kingdom, and the Kingdom of God which is to come in the millennium, we continually struggle by both flesh and faith to be faithful. Presently, the growing secular, morally “neutral” standard is depriving us of freedom speech, freedom of religion, freedom of gathering together, freedom of honest work, freedom of education, freedom to pray in public, and more. If you are an American who is not aware of those limitations, you are poorly informed. I suspect that you readers who are non-American saints have and see those same problems where you live.

Although the militant secularists will not admit to it, they are convinced that forced secularization is the only way to enlightened neutrality. They are wrong. Their hostility masquerades as neutrality, as the prince of this world struggles to overcome our Prince Jesus, His remnant, and the growth of His kingdom. Look up, saints.

1. I am told that of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, 7,283 are on money, and that those numbers prove something about God’s nature. I think that is right. It speaks to His steadfast righteousness while even dealing with earthly issues [nothing new about Him there, but He wants us to join Him in that ability]. So, it indicates that a person can think about things like money [the love for which is the root of all evil] at least one-fourth of his time, according to the quality and quantity of his righteousness, but if he does not have a love of money he can go cleanly to and from work daily – 1 Tim. 6:10. Don’t be afraid of money, or of dealing with or talking about money. But guard your heart and your dealings.
2. One of the most fundamental ways to describe the outworking of sin is that sin wants and demands its own path. We want to be free, to be ourselves, to do our own thing, to fulfill our destiny. The path may be a major direction of life, or it may be one of many few seconds of having our own way.

Sin wants to burst apart the absolute truth that says we can do nothing of ourselves – John 15:5. Yes, of course, we can do many things that are not of God or seem to be of Him, but we will find that what God calls “nothing” is exactly that and will be shown to be exactly nothing when we desperately need “something,” as in Matt. 7:22-23. Spiritual life [the only reality] hinges upon living a life actively dependent on the Lord.

It is human nature to want our own way, and we do it “all the time.” But when rebellion, stubbornness, self-will, and other deliberateness are at the root of our actions, we are in trouble with our loving Father who is dedicated to removing the cancer. He disciplines, and even scourges, those whom He loves, and that is me, and is you – Ps. 119:75; Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19.

Thank you, Lord, for every function of your perfect love. Whenever self is allowed to rule in the place of Christ Jesus the result is sin, sorrow, separation and death. There is a something that is reality; there is an abundance of nothing that is absolutely nothing.

1. As always, keep your theology balanced. When you read the many verses in scripture that say things like:

a) God killed King Saul – 1 Chron. 10:13-14.

b) God does evil things – Amos 3:6.

c) This evil is from the Lord – 2 Kings 6:33.

d) God brought this evil upon us – Jer. 16:10.

e) God created evil – Is. 45:7.

f) God brings evil/disaster – Is. 31:2.

g) I have created the destroyer to ruin – Is. 54:16c.

h) God scourges every son of His – Heb. 12:6

i) He sent a letter to a church saying that He was going to vomit some of them out of His mouth – Rev. 3:16.

j) He erases names from His book of life – Rev. 3:5.

k) He kills people with pestilence – Rev. 2:23.

And many more examples of the same, which your concordance can reveal, how do you handle it?

Job understood the Lord and His ways, and thus knew how to handle Life. He knew that God created lemons and that lemons make excellent lemonade – Rom. 8:28. That Old Testament saint had good theology and walked in the light of what he knew. Nothing shallow about Job, David, Moses, and lots of others who are in that cloud of our witnesses. Everything that exists, exists to praise the Lord, and will be found doing so when the final scene is accomplished.

I may need to repent some day of some of my understanding of the all-mightiness of God [His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence], for knowing Him as the Lord of All [situations, persons, places and things], but all of His creation shows it and all of His word speaks it. Perhaps knowing the Lord better and better is essential to seeing that and other deeper truths in the Bible.

In the finality of things, knowing Him is the summation of it all -- Phil. 3:10. In Jesus Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge [which all men seek, whether in righteousness or evil] – Col. 2:3. By seeking Him we gain insight into those “all things.” No wonder that the Christian world has been the source of so much scientific, economic and other innovations. Thus, to not seek Him, or to seek Him without giving Him the preeminence, leads us in the direction of fruitlessness. And, as we of the decreasingly Christian world cease to give Him His place, we can expect less fruitfulness.

1. [This Thought may require a little more patience than your usual, while it develops.] Adam and Eve did not do an obviously bad thing when they ate the fruit. They were eating that which God had made for them. He Himself had called it “good.” He had created them to be like Him, and with authority to rule over creation, including fruit. It was reasonable and inevitable [but disobedience] – so they ate what He set before them. They did what they thought in their God-made minds would be a good and enjoyable simple thing. They ate some of the fruit of that harmless tree that in God’s and their evaluation had good qualities and no obviously bad qualities. In fact, they had been touching and tending it along with the other trees. God was right; it was really good. It was such a small matter to just eat of the God-created good fruit of that tree like all of the other good fruit trees.

Did not He love them? They were not acting immorally. What harm could come from eating God’s provision? They agreed that it was good by every measure. Certainly, if there was a problem with their eating it, the Creator’s great love and purpose for them, He who walked with them and talked with them in the cool of the evenings, would understand and would overlook or fix any problem caused by their dietary indiscretion! He is the one great, limitless God, which we all know and depend upon.

Their trouble was that their simple and enjoyable thing was exactly that, their thing, the exercise of their will contrary to God’s expressed will. Although at that time they were unable to say, “Everyone else is doing it,” it was the value and authority of God’s word against their personal desire and independent judgment. It had nothing to do with the fruit, but all to do with the vast difference between them and their Creator – an infinite difference, which had been already in the process of being bridged by His early development of family fellowship.

But there was unrest and rebellion brewing in the heavenlies. The angels, then known as “sons of God,” were about to lose their position as sons of God. They were creatids, as also were these new human creatids. One third of the angels utterly rejected God’s plan for a different, replacement variety of sons. They rebelled, which is always the result and evidence of disobedience. God threw them out of heaven onto the earth, where the yet-perfect humans lived!! The chief rebel was and still is Satan, the devil. The results were essential parts of His plans – inadequate man must fall and God must provide a Redeemer through man’s faith alone through grace.

In Revelation 2:7 John wrote, “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life.” Overcoming has to do with steadfastly choosing the unchangeable will of God, in contrast to our personal and malleable will. [Definition of malleable: susceptibility to the shaping power of surrounding influences]. For a Christian, overcoming has less often to do with rejecting obvious moral evil, and more often to do with living according to the Lord’s expressed will for “me.”

So, Adam and Eve sinned when they fell into the trap of simply yielding to their self-life, also called “the flesh.” Truly, the forbidden fruit appeared good and pleasant; the Creator had created it that way, and for His and their purposes. They could have become overcomers by refusing to be re-shaped by Satan’s enticements, but instead decided it was “o. k.” to do good, pleasant and desirable things – Gen. 3:6. They chose the deceptive pleasures of self-determination [“the flesh”] instead of the way of life [“the way of the cross”].

For humanity, the way of the cross does not look life-giving at all, but a rugged, tiresome, dry, unattractive life chosen by those who do not have a mind to know better. But the way of God’s desire for us is not death; it is His life out of our death, by way of our consistent choice of His will. Eating of the tree of life is the Way of Life.

A bit of talking about the way of the cross can be considered obligatory from time to time, but going its Way as a lifestyle means eating of its fruit and not of the many other attractive [good, pleasant and desirable] fruit along the way. Disciples of Jesus are noted for eating fruit of the tree of life, and for living and teaching of the good fruit of the cross. Matthew [12:33] heard Jesus tell the Pharisees [the teachers of God’s word] to “Either make the tree good and it’s fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.” In other words, “Get it straight and teach it right so that God’s way versus man’s way will be clearly seen and lived!”

God’s purpose for the universe, including each of our little universes, is that in all things Jesus Christ have the preeminence. Since you and I are part of the universe, that includes us – as Adam and Eve learned. As life-long Christians, we have heard that He has a purpose for each of us, and that it includes everything about us. That is true. There is a life that is submitted to and totally dependent on the Lord. The blessed Holy Spirit leads us out of the pleasures and goodnesses of our self-directed lives, into that life in the Spirit.

So much of preaching and teaching and living has the two ways smushed together so much that the way of the cross and the good, pleasant and desirable ways of man seem to be one and the same. To say it bluntly and wrongly, “Live a good, pleasant and desirable Christian life. Be sure to put in a dash of the cross from time to time; but not too much. Don’t expose yourself to difficulties on purpose.” Jesus told us to take up our cross daily and follow [do like] Him. That is the Life, and the Way. Overcomers of self are on it. None are yet perfected, but are on the way.

A note smuggled from the underground church in Communist Romania read: “We don’t pray to be better Christians, but that we may be the only kind of Christians God means us to be – Christlike Christians; that is, Christians who will bear willingly the cross for God’s glory.”

1. Everything and everyone have purpose. That is a kingdom of God truth that cannot be found in the kingdom of this world. In the Lord’s kingdom, suffering and failure have their purposes; pride and sin have their purposes, victory and success have their purposes. All things have purpose – some to encourage, some to discourage; some to teach, to correct, to diminish, to elevate, to provide good or bad example, and to reward.

The devil is perhaps our second-best example of God’s purpose in everything. He was created for God’s good purposes, both before his fall and after, and he is getting his job done, not only in Job’s and Jesus’ lives. There is nothing that does not have God’s purpose, either directly and obviously, or indirectly and eventually. All will furnish its purpose. That is because God is absolutely the Lord. Jesus’ disaster is our most obvious example.

Romans 8:28 reminds us that we can be the recipients of good, no matter how bad things get in our lives, if we love the Lord and yield to His purposes for us in both good and bad situations. That leaves the other side of the coin, that if we do not love the Lord and do not yield to His purposes, the bad in our lives will not produce good results in our lives. The results then are that we become bad testimonies [but for the benefit of others], examples of what could have been, to help direct others along the Way – examples: Judas Iscariot, King Saul, Ananias and Sapphira, and others of the Old and New Testaments who are given us as essential negative examples.

All creation has its purpose, and the Lord will not in the least be thwarted. The non-created God also has His unrevealed purposes of mind and nature. They, too, will all be accomplished. As we grow spiritually, we begin to see Him in every detail, not only in spectacular things. That which we call random events are actually part of God’s appointed order. His divine designs are everywhere, nothing anywhere excluded.

Early-on and at times during our short earth-walk with the Lord, the Holy Spirit will whisper clarifying and encouraging things to us like, “God loves you anyway and has a great plan for your life. Repent, keep going; it will all make sense later.” Deeper love and spiritual maturity have come when we more often hear, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” Hearing and living the message of our crosses reveals purpose in everything.

When the fiery trials come, and when they increase, they should not seem strange. Rejoice. We are sharing in Jesus’ sufferings so that when the full story is finally revealed we will be exceedingly joyful. If we are suffering for our unrighteousness, rejoice in our chastisement and yield unto good results. If we don’t, we may be among those valuable negative testimonies of God’s righteous judgment on earth and in glory.

1. America and Europe are in deep trouble. Our national and moral foundations are collapsing. But what is to be expected when the church ceases living and teaching the gospel, and sin is no longer called sin? A basic root to our problems: Sin looks normal and righteousness looks strange [or worse].

As deeds, the list is long: homosexuality and other sexual confusion, fornication, general immorality and impurity, abortion, lying, cheating, greed, dissensions and strife, emphasis of differences, irreconcilability, disorder and anarchy [family and society], treachery, desertion and divorce, hate and murder, alcohol and drug abuse, gluttony and general excesses, rebellion, jealousy, theft and dishonesty, divisiveness, unjust laws, pride, entrenched opposition and enmity, idolatry [being formed and led by spiritual forces other than the Holy Spirit] , apostasy, and more. Those who practice such things will not inherent the kingdom of God – Gal. 5:19-21.

 What’s to say? Not believing in God, Jesus, biblical morality and behavior – anything coming out of that blindness is not helpful. Repenting, turning to the Lord Jesus, giving yourself to Him, and asking Him to forgive you and change you – that’s helpful. Ask the Lord to make a good job of you. Anything else is folly and vanity.

1. It has been said that Thee Path leads us from being an unbeliever, to new born believer, to worshipper, to honoring Him, discipleship, to obedience, to allegiance, to loving Him, to knowing Him, to friend of God. That may be splitting it up a bit, but we get the picture of spiritual growth, and the message of our not stopping along the way.

Have you noticed that a friend of a friend is your friend? That’s God at work. If Jesus is your friend, His friend is your friend – Acts 9:10-20. That’s us, friend. He is the reason for our friendship, for why we get along, why we endure one another beyond our personal enjoyment or endurability.

1. Probably the Lord’s most clear and doable instruction regarding our occupancy until He comes again is, “Watch and pray.” That we can do.
2. When we consider that the tithe [10%] is God’s portion of our income, we are worse off than those Old Testament saints were. The tithe was a minimum for them, established by Mosaic Law. The New Testament is about giving the Lord all of our self and possessions. That is the Law of Love, Jesus’s well-spoken “best law in the Bible.” The Lord’s portion is everything. When we see and do that, all falls into place financially, and not just financially, because of our clear and eternal purpose.
3. One thing the Lord is doing [and is always doing] is working to reveal Himself and His eternal purposes to the world. It may be observed that He is doing that especially during spiritual declines among believers. Moderately paraphrasing, “His eyes are moving to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose hearts are completely His” – 2 Chron. 16:9.

In order to do that, He does a wondrous thing -- He selects and establishes for Himself a small band of people who will represent His interests. What is really wondrous is that when He is preparing to do a big thing, He uses only little people. The definition of a little person is someone who is little in their own eyes. That means they are humble without knowing it, although He knows it and delights in them.

Some of His little people are big people when He selects them [like big Saul of Tarsus who became the humble and available apostle Paul] but He does not leave them in their sad condition. He does more of the impossible; He changes them because He will not use big people for a big job.

When He has His little [still imperfect] people in hand, He will move immediately to gather, protect and strengthen a larger group called a remnant. A remnant is the smaller part of the larger whole. The remnant will align themselves with Him, His thoughts, His kingdom, and His will. He will help the remnant see two things: 1) the deceptive contrary forces facing them [the enemy, which will include “good” people], and 2) that the remnant is invincible. At that point, heaven is the limit and, of course, is the Lord’s purpose.

1. Some thoughts on unity vs. separation:

1) An ability to maintain unity despite time, distance and stain indicates that we have a breadth and depth of character that applies to everything in our lives. It proves our Christian message, its power, its reality, its value. The ability to maintain covenant [unity] is a necessary ingredient of every Beatitude – Matt. 5:3-12. On the other hand, our divisions disprove our message no matter how sweet, sincere, or threatening we appear otherwise – John 17:21.

2) Jesus, rather than separate from those who were in doctrinal error and hated Him, let them cut Him off. Could that be another of His examples for us to follow? Let’s take up our crosses and do that.

3) We need the Holy Spirit to do John 16:13-14 or we will continue being mired in our religious humanity. Our best flesh can appear instead to be the Spirit at work if we don’t recognize or care about the difference.

4) It is not the differences in our theologies that grieve the Lord, or our lack of adherence to them, but our lack of love for one another.

5) There is often a haughtiness in our separations, a lack of grief, a lack of face-to-face on- site humility, which Jesus had and showed. That lack guarantees us more divisions, and subdivisions, and sub-subdivisions.

6) If we loved Jesus and our brothers, we would be in pain and would seek healing on the spot, even after generations of separation.

7) It is as if we shove the Lord aside in our rush to divide and remain unhealed.

8) Our self-righteousness destroys us. It cannot be limited or turned off and on at will. It becomes us. It is strongly entrenched in our flesh – a strong tower. Genuine repentance with remedial actions is necessary, but rare.

1. “The true test of a saint’s life is not successfulness, but faithfulness, on the human level of life” – Oswald Chambers.
2. I think this Thought is the truth. I gathered it from understandings of scripture, observation of other saints’ lives, and personal experience. It is that sufferings and loss, failures and doubt, dark and low days and years are necessary, or we will not grow. Yes, difficulties will cause some to turn back, and others will stagger for a spell, but all must go through the fire of human testing to the end of their personal abilities. We must experience the truth, that our flesh will fail us and that truly all we have is the Lord. It is not sufficient to know that principle and other truths intellectually; they must be embedded in our souls through first-hand experience. It must be proven of essential value to “me.” We must experience the end of our selves and the independent ministry of the Helper – John 16:7.

Do you hear that? if not, take a while to go over it in your closet with the Lord.

1. Does your practical doubt interfere with the depth and beauty of a more vital relationship with the Lord, a relationship that perhaps you see but have not entered into? If so, welcome to the club, the club that is exactly that way but is going to do something about it.

Our problem is almost always in the area of disobedience. More specifically, we are not doing well with obeying Him and His word in the area of passages that require personal sacrifice. Sometimes we think we are doing well in those areas but really, we have accepted the spun-down pablum versions that we have been fed all of our churched lives. We have been taught the Lord Jesus did not really mean exactly what He said. So, we ended up denying the truth and efficacy of what He said. We have become professing believers but in fact we are practical atheists.

We can divide Jesus’ hearers into believers vs. disbelievers, and divide the believers into followers vs. non-followers, and the followers into those who denied themselves and took up their crosses to follow Him vs. tag-alongers seeking excitement and blessings. The self-deniers and cross-bearers were those who took Him at His words, refusing to spin His words into something that would fit the desires of their religious souls. That sounds like our twenty first century, does it not.

Jesus meant what He said, and still means what He said. Listen to your heart, reader, if you want to become Jesus’ follower. His deepest fellowship and His best promises are for those who follow Him without reservation. When you begin to do that, He will give you just a few others who are doing the same, then a few more, and a few more – soon adding to your fellowship those who are not at all like you. Love them and you will begin to experience real life. You will find why the Holy Spirit calls that group “the Body of Christ.” It will mirror Him, and have the power and character of the body Christ had 2,000 years ago. No less – John 14:12; 15:4, 7.

That offer has laid in the roadside dust for too long, being found only by those who hungered and thirsted for reality.

1. This Thought is a bit long – 10 pages. It is from a talk on Faith and Finances, the sort you can read at bedtime, using it to doze off to sleep. Enjoy!

There is no topic in heaven or on earth that cannot be brought properly under the title of “The Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Money and property are probably the most common examples for us, partly because so much time and space in the Bible is given to it. I have not counted them myself, but I am told that of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, 7,283 are on money. So, I have good news for those who are involved deeply with money and other earthly possessions; the Lord is totally involved in financial transactions, and has a strong focus on money and property. The question for us is whether we want to experience His financial lordship? If we do, He will give us clear teaching from scripture and timely, real time, directly applicable testimony.

To the point: Money is good. The church and other benevolent organizations want and need it, and so does each of us. Laborers on every job are worthy of their pay check; they are trading time, efforts and talents for money, which in turn is traded for most other types of needs. Money is God-approved. He created money, meaning gold and silver in the earth during week one, looked at it, and said, “That’s good.” He tells us to share money among ourselves, and generously at that. Paul wrote to Timothy that everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude, for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. Any problem with money and other “stuff” lies within us when we want more or other than we should have, or when we do not steward money and stuff as their Owner desires.

However, money can be as dangerous as picking up a snake by the tail. The Lord and we are in this project together, and His good things do not need to have dominion over us – need not bite us. We are not to allow the tentacles or roots of money, or of anything else, to poison our souls.

Christians know how important money is to life and ministry. Money and success and property are good, but don’t let them rule over you. They can take authority over us and silently suck out our spiritual life under the guise of some form of “practicality.” The Lord will wonderfully supply all of the needs of His disciples when we allow Him to direct our lives, then to establish our needs in our callings, and then maintain His mentorship over us. We know all of that, but sin is sneaky. Simply put, there can be a vast difference between what God can do with what we have, and what we will allow Him to do with us. We are dealing with God Himself, and He with us, and money and stuff are common tools He uses on our eternal souls.

This is certainly not what is called a prosperity gospel message. Remember that we have millions of faithful brothers and sisters around the world who live in poverty and many are dying because they have simply chosen to follow the Lord and will not hide or deny Him. They are worse off than was the Apostle Paul, who was at least allowed to be helped by his friends while in prison. The Lord guarantees us His brand of prosperity as we trust and obey Him – as long as we allow Him to define “prosperity” in our case. Those modern saints, mostly in third world nations, are praising the Lord that He has given them the opportunity to trust Him in the way of their trials.

In a letter to the outside world this year, from the persecuted church in China, a group of pastors encouraged us Americans to stay our course and to pray, not for their deliverance, but for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ in their trials. They wrote that their severe persecutions are strengthening and increasing the church. They asked only for Bibles and prayer. They are praying for us.

With that said, this talk is a series of testimonies about the Lord and me, and our money. It will be about our money. About money! I will try to stay on money, and not get too far off the subject onto other areas of testimony to the Lord’s wonderful power and faithfulness. So, get ready for things “Money.”

Step No. 1: When I was 34, the Lord marched into my life. He made me an offer -- His life for mine. My immediate response was, “Yes,” I want You to be No. 1 in my life.” He blew that away in just a few seconds, letting me know that He was to be my entire LIFE, not the first on a list of continually challenging competitors. As my LIFE, He would arrange my priority list for me, but He would not be on it.

I had found the pearl of great value in the field of the world. I bought it on the spot because it cost me all that I was, had, or would have. A price of less than “all of me” would have shown Him to a cheap God, and I wanted none of that. I was serious.

The more the Lord showed me the cost to me of our life-exchange, the more I wanted it – His life for mine, my life for His. In fact, I told Him if it did not cost all of me, I would not even start. He assured me that He could take care of that if I would make the next move. It was done in a few minutes in the silence of my quietened soul. I experienced that which Jesus said was necessary; I had entered His kingdom and His lordship. Then we began the journey into Step No. 2.

In scripture we see that the Lord Jesus came to form a body. He calls it the Body of Christ, which strongly indicates that His Body is to be as recognizable and as functional as was Christ Himself in His one-person human body 2,000 years ago. Since His present Body is made of people, we have to be possessed by His same Spirit, and unified, as He prayed that night before He was arrested. The Body of Christ can be but should not be a sickly, disjointed body, but a healthy, powerful, well-coordinated body with Him as the head -- the actively thinking, communicating, and directing provider and power.

I said those things about the Body of Christ because after my commitment to Him, He put me together immediately with four other men who recently had made the same life-exchange with Him as I had. Unlike me, they had been long-time committed Christians, one a clergyman, and had been living good Christian lives. I had been some degree of believer but was living in my own self-will; I was the center of my life. We five men were drawn together like birds of a feather. Despite living miles apart [within 60 miles], we began to meet daily, then twice daily, and even three times daily. Within a year we moved within a few blocks of one another in Houston so we and our families could share our new life together daily.

Because the Lord was our life, and He owned everything, we had all things in common. We each owned and cared for our own things but loaned or gave them to one another or to others as needed. We were stewards and the Lord was the owner of us and our stuff.

[CAR TESTIMONY: My car disappeared from the driveway overnight. It had been stolen. What does a Christian follower of Jesus do when something of the Lord’s has been stolen? Of course, he finds the thief and gives him something else to go along with the stolen item. “If someone takes your coat, give him your shirt.” That is a basic instruction on how His Body is to live. So, since I was not good at finding car thieves, I notified the Houston Police Department and waited for them to find the thief for me. I had the keys and title to what was now the thief’s car and he didn’t know it. In a couple of days, the Police found the car abandoned on a school yard overnight, without its wheels or bucket seats. I replaced those parts and again enjoyed the car. That thief did not know that he had stolen a Christian’s car. If he had been caught, or otherwise come to me, he would have had that nice car clear-title, and been free to enjoy it.]

Jesus said that if we would seek His rulership, real rulership, in our lives, all of the natural needs of this life would be added to us, by Him. He was not talking about what is commonly referred to as the Prosperity Doctrine, which says if we have enough faith, we can have what we want. No. The Lord does not promise to make us rich in money and property, but to see that we get all that we need to fulfill the calling in life that He has for us. When we begin to obey Him, we move beyond being a “good Christian.” He said, “If My word abides in you, and you abide in my word, then ask what you will and it will be done unto you.” That is His promise of provision, customized for each of us, and it greatly depends on our living together as the Body of Christ. I and we were finding what it meant to be abiders in Christ, and it started with His word abiding in us.

Step No. 3: So, we five were living biblically as our families became closely knit into a unit, into a recognizable Body of Christ. [A MINI-TEACHING: Close biblical living is such an intensification of the ordinary Christian life that one year in it accomplishes like 20 years of ordinary-time spiritual growth. It increases genuine love like compound interest does on your financial investments. It is a quality of life that cannot be duplicated, and is solidly biblical. There is nothing like it in the usual “good Christian life.” Closer living raises issues and offers opportunities that we would otherwise not face; that a thousand Sundays could not make us face. Why? Because closeness requires loving sacrifice. For Christians, it is a willing and loving sacrifice. I am sure that each of you have had a taste of it in marriage and family living, but this includes other Christians who want the life they see in you; they will lay aside their lives to be part of yours full-time. Some are bright, educated and capable; others are needy in all ways but are hungry for what you have and display. At times our household would be Nancy and me, our 5 sons, and as many as 15 others.]

[Another MINI-TEACHING: In Psalm 68:5-6 the Lord says He is a father of the fatherless and judge for the widows. He says He makes a home for the lonely and leads out the prisoners into prosperity. Some of the “fatherless” whom we took as family already had fathers and grandfathers, and they were already in close relationship with them; The Lord’s grace gave us to them to father in the Lord. Some of the “homeless” already had elegant homes, better than ours. We took them into our homes or, if they were families, they moved into the neighborhood so they could become part of the neighborhood of God. The Lord has a home for those who are lonely for Him and His righteousness. It costs a lot to bring previous strangers to live with you as family, to parent them in every way. Some are younger or older than you, some are more or less educated than you, some are housebroken and some not housebroken. But all are wanting and willing to lay down their lives in order to become like Christ, and somehow, they receive God’s grace to trust you to lead them into it. It is costly for everyone, but so is anything that is precious.]

So, others saw our lives and joined us in our Christian walk. Each of us five guys had our natural born family plus the others, and the church was growing significantly, so that in three years the Lord had built a recognizable, local body of serious, joyful, productive believers, in which He was doing things that He had done 2,000 years ago when for 33 years He was in His one-person body -- like we read right there in our Bibles. Those biblical things happened to us because we believed His words and examples, had His Spirit, and paid the cost of admission into its reality. As usual, the Lord started small and in the practicalities of our daily lives and workplaces.

I really needed a new self-identity. As a country boy who had made good, my self-identity had been “Dr. Eckert,” like, “I AM AN IMPORTANT, SELF-MADE PERSON!” It was time for the Lord to teach me how to be “God’s son” who did some doctoring. Because of my personal commitment to Him, I was prepared to leave medicine and do whatever the Lord wanted. Because of my personal commitment to my brothers of the Lord’s body, my decision became a matter of prayer among us five; seeking the Lord’s will. [Remember that scripture says “we” have the mind of Christ – 1 Cor. 2:16. We found that each of us had aspects of Christ’s mind on matters, so when we listened together we had a more complete picture of His will, and the composite results were remarkable – Matt. 18:20.] It was decided among us that I should continue in medicine, so I joined a clinic of 4 other doctors near the docks in Houston where the medical charges were very reasonable but were still cash or insurance before treatment.

Step No. 4: The Lord had said He wanted me to treat all my patients as my family, as my mothers and fathers and as brothers and sisters. That meant more than being nice to them, so when I found that some of my patients could not get back in to see me because they did not have the money, I made arrangements with the clinic business office for my patients to see me, and the clinic would be reimbursed from my monthly pay check [which was based on my patients’ payments]. When my patients could not afford their lab or x-ray fees, I paid for them likewise. When I found that some of my patients could not afford their prescriptions, I made arrangements at the two pharmacies across the street for them to give my patients their medications, and bill me at the end of the month.

That’s how I treated my natural-born family, so that’s how I treated my patients as family. My family was growing; so was I. My self-identity was actually becoming, “God’s son” who did some doctoring. I could see why Jesus had said to semi-serious people, “If you want to be my disciples, sell all that you have, give the money to the poor, then come and follow me.” I didn’t follow those particular instructions, but that’s what worked out as I simply obeyed Him in the setting of the life in which He came to me.

Our kids’ toys were disappearing from our fenced-in back yard, and we noticed them in the backyard of a house several doors from us. We did not know those people. What to do? Yes, as with the stolen car, gift them with something. Nancy baked a fine cake, took it to the lady of that house, presented it at the door with some kind, neighborly words, and left without any reference to the toys. We lost no more toys [although getting our toys back, or losing no more of them, was not our motivation for obeying the Lord]. That was simple and easy, and life was just beginning. Our kids were learning about toys and the Lord; Nancy and I were learning about dollars and the Lord.

I pulled into the parking lot in downtown Houston. I was late to court, to testify on behalf of a patient. I knew that I was really low on money and might not have enough money to pay my parking fee, but hoped for the Lord’s provision. As I hustled down the sidewalk to the court house I approached a bus stop where perhaps a dozen persons were waiting for their buses. A man in the group walked toward me. Our eyes met. I knew what he was going to say! He asked, “Buddy, do you have 25 cents to round out my bus fare?” Considering my parking fee more important than his bus fare [that should have been a red flag!], I told him, “No” and kept walking. Somehow, he knew I was a cheap, lying [for 25 cents] son of a female dog because as I passed him, he said so. I heard “something of the Lord” in what he said. [Recall King David being cursed by Shimei, and David said he heard the Lord speaking to him in Shimei’s words.] I got to the courthouse, testified for my patient, then headed back to the parking lot and collected my car. Would you like to guess how much money I had left over? Yes, 25 cents. That stranger needed 25 cents “now,” but I thought I needed it “later,” so I stole 25 cents from the Lord like Judas, Jesus’ treasurer, stole from His purse. “Whatever we do unto the least of these, that’s what we do unto the Lord.” I still get strength from that failed encounter, and hope that you do, too. Jesus said to His disciples, “Give to those who ask.” He still says that to disciples, and disciples usually obey.

A new family had recently come into fellowship at the church [that full-life, no-holds-barred fellowship between God and disciples, and disciples and disciples] and one evening I was working with them to get their lives straightened. I could see that they had a pressing need for $1,000, and they had no money or immediate means for their need. During those first twelve months following my move to Houston I had been receiving a monthly check from the accounts receivable at the practice I had left to move to Houston, so for a short time each month I had money. At that time, I had $1,000 – a large household and only $1,000. Jesus and my new brother needed $1,000 now and it was located in my bank account.

My CPA had told me that I should be keeping some of that accounts receivable money because I would be needing thousands to pay my Income Tax, but others around me continued being in true need and every month “it went.” I went home, wrote the check for $1,000, went back, gave it to him, and returned home. When I walked in the door, Nancy told me that our CPA had called and that I should call him. I did. His report was that he had worked over my income tax return three times, and although he did not understand it, the government owed me money.

[ANOTHER MINI TEACHING: Efforts to establish Christian brotherliness in the body of Christ, while avoiding uncomfortable or over-sacrificial situations, is an incompatible effort. Scripture shows that those earlier Christians depended on miracles for their livelihood and relationships – in all types of circumstances, including their daily survival. The days of miracles are relatively over because we do not “obey/abide for them, or “pay for them.” These days, we moderns have the same gospel words, and desire the same fruits of the Christian life, but we are no longer willing to pay the price. Even in the church we must acknowledge the tragic truth that everything and everyone has been corrupted by sin. We are part of that whole creation that is groaning and travailing in its longing to be set free from its bondage and decay – Rom. 8:21-22. Everything is fallen, including the church, with its yearning for redemption and transformation. We, as church, have the power of God’s love within and among us to change things where we are, to bring the world alive -- when we pay the price to make up that which is lacking in Christ’s ministry – Col. 1:24. Some of the price to be paid is with our money and stuff.]

An attorney had come into fellowship with us. I had met him but not had opportunity to become acquainted. One day the Lord simply told me to give him $5,000. I had that amount from the monthly accounts receivable, so I wrote him the check and gave it to him. He asked me if it was really the Lord who had told me to give him the money. I told him, “Yes,” and wondered why he had asked that question. I did not know, but He was in charge of several trusts, and had been taking money from them, replacing the money by taking from other trusts before a shorted trust was audited. He had begun counseling with our pastor, and had committed to no further stealing, and to taking his punishment. My check had exactly matched his need, to the dollar. And it was my “last dollar.” My left “giving” hand was paying no attention to my right “receiving” hand – Matt. 6:3-4. Jesus was doing the accounting.

We needed to move from an apartment into a larger house because we had begun to accumulate other believers who wanted to be brought up full-time in Christ, like we were learning to live the gospel. They were serious because we were serious. We bought a large two-story house, remodeled it inside and out, furnished it, and moved in. Then one day, perhaps a year later, we visited a family of 3 adults and their 6 young children, plus about 6 more very small children taken in from street-people families. They had a small four-room house. The husband’s demented mother was totally bedfast and the family was her total care. The husband’s place to sleep was on a mattress under the dining room table. That was the most peaceful and loving household that you can imagine. The wife’s income from her nursing job was their household support. On our way home that day, Nancy and I decided to give them our home. They accepted. The entire process took about 10 days.

For hundreds of years the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland had been fighting a terrorist-type civil war. The Lord told me and two other brothers to go to Northern Ireland, to share our personal and congregational testimony with religious and political leaders there. We did, and He did wonderful things like starting a powerful revival on the campus of Queen’s College campus in Belfast. We had a short series of evening and early morning meetings with students in the student center. The Lord’s Spirit fell on us every meeting. As those students graduated, they went back to their counties and the Lord spread the revival across Northern Ireland. In short time, He also stopped the Protestant-Catholic strife.

But I want to tell you the money part of that testimony, don’t I. Before we went on that trip, we met with our church elders and told them what we knew of the Lord’s instructions for the trip, including that they, the elders, were to pay for our three-week trip. They heard and agreed to all that we said, then the 18 of them emptied their pockets and purses of money, wrote checks, and some brought checks the next day. None of them had any spare money, and we knew it. One of those elders was the lady to whom we had given our house. She was now widowed. Remember that her household was supported only by her income. When she gave me her endorsed monthly paycheck, everything in me [except the Lord] wanted to give it back to her; but I couldn’t. That was a Sunday evening. The next morning, she received 2 unexpected checks in the mail totaling within a dollar of her paycheck. Those elders’ right hands were not letting their left hands know what the other was doing. Again, the Head of the church was doing the accounting. Notice that that testimony was an ongoing part of Step No. 2.

The Lord told a brother and me to go to a certain remote village in southern Mexico, where we would find a priest in a church. His purpose in our going was for us to have fellowship with that priest. We checked, and found that there was considerable strife in that area between Catholics and Protestants, and we were Protestants [but not protestant Protestants]. The Lord told us to not use our own money for the trip, and that He would give us the money. We knew we were not to tell anyone of our financial need; which would be considering the Lord incapable of providing what He had promised on His own.

We cleared our Spiritual leading with the church leaders, got a 100% “GO” from them, made our plans, told no one of our financial need, and awaited departure day and the money. Several people gave us some money because we were “going on a missionary trip,” but on the day of departure we still lacked $275. [NOTE: We had used some of the money donated for our trip to meet others’ unrelated needs because we had no money of our own to give them.] On the day of departure, our bags were packed and plane reservations made [to be paid in cash before boarding]. I received a phone call from a brother who was at that time becoming a part of our church life. He did not even know of our planned trip. Nancy took the call; he said to Nancy, “The Lord is telling me to give Bob $275. Does he need it?” Yes, we did.

Starting with that trip, the Lord gave us deep, brotherly fellowship with the several priests in and passing through that Mexican village. The Lord healed one priest on his deathbed when, in the presence of two other priests, I laid my hands on him and prayed. That led to fellowship with the local bishop [who, in a radio address, welcomed me, an unveiled Protestant, to work in his diocese]. Vital to that invitation is a spine-tingling little story of a close brotherly fellowship granted with the Papal Nuncio to Mexico. Subsequently, I visited him twice in his Mexico City residence, and we carried one another in our hearts as he became Papal Nuncio to Canada, then a cardinal in the Vatican, and now abides with Jesus in heaven.

Step No. 5: The Fourth Ward is Houston’s most concentrated poverty area. With a burden and a sense of calling to the area, I established a clinic in a closed storefront. I had nothing, meaning no money, no furniture, no medical equipment – nothing except the Lord and some untrained volunteers who were being brought up in the Lord’s life. By the end of the first week we had daily volunteer nurses, furniture, medical equipment, and laboratory equipment with technologist -- as the Lord sent the word of His ministry around Houston’s hospitals and clinics. Then came volunteer doctors part-time.

After one year we did not have room to breathe in that small building, so we re-located in a larger facility, an abandoned church. There the Lord added a pharmacy with pharmacist, physical therapist, larger laboratory staff, and more part-time physician volunteers.

After three years in that location we again needed more room, so leased an abandoned supermarket. A drywall company did their extensive work inside without charge. In short time we had 75 full-time and about 75 part-time workers, with only a few taking home a very small pay check. The Lord added a full-time dentist and a full-time optometrist, increased our part- time doctors to 10 [each about one-half day per week], and had 3 of us volunteer doctors full-time. In our main waiting room we had a sign which said, “This is a private clinic, but you will not receive a bill. Please pay what you are willing and able.” We were treating family.

A group of wealthy ladies asked me to talk to their group about our clinic work. After I had finished describing our life together and ministry of Jesus Christ to our patients, they asked me a question: “What do you need?” Their hearts and finances were open to the Lord and to us. The question stumped me. I stood there thinking, “Lord, what do we need?” My mind was blank. Then the Lord gave me His answer. “Oh, we don’t need anything, thank you. We are not a needy people.” I invited them to get involved with us in the ministry, and they did.

[YEARS PASSED]

Step No. 6: Nancy and I and family moved to Athens, Texas, into a typical medical group practice setting, still not requiring patients to pay if they could not or did not want to pay me. Of course, the Lord continued bringing in the needy and lonely. [That’s my God-assigned family task.] My personal income increased, so for the first time in 15 years I started being able to save money that was “left over” at year’s end. I attended to being generous, but still had money left over for savings. I felt guilty for saving that which I knew others surely needed, but I had a fairly solid sense that it was what the Lord wanted me to do at that time. The change was not easy because basic truths like, “Give to those who ask,” and “If you want to be My disciple, sell what you have, give the money to the poor, then come and follow me” kept ringing in my heart. In due time I learned why I should save, because then I could, and did, have larger amounts to give – on occasions giving more per year than that year’s gross income. The Lord is an excellent accountant when He is allowed use of His money.

My receptionist told me about two financially capable patients, neither of whom had paid me a single dollar for their frequent medical visits over perhaps 10 years. The next time they [individually] came in, I treated them, probably prayed with them as usual, then warmly suggested to them that they find another doctor whose care they thought enough of that they would pay. [What a failure on my part! God’s son who worked for His Father was no longer taking care of the family! Shame.] Each one was hang-dog about it and left [yes, without paying]. Each continued coming back for their medical care, never paying, and I continued treating them because they were my family.

Banks and Savings and Loans were closing in 1984. I had an opportunity to buy some stock from a bank that I knew was financially very stable. I raked together $38,000. of my money and bought the stock. It is now worth over $1 million and growing at 10% to 15% annually. [Remember that I am still a little guy financially.]

Our home 8 miles south of Athens sat on 6 beautifully wooded acres, on a low hill mostly surrounded by flowing water, which we shared with beaver, deer and other critters. We had designed and built it as our final earthly residence. Some months before the Lord involved us here in Corpus Christi [11 years ago, in 2008], He awakened me one night and simply said, “Give your home to Chris.” Chris is a friend. The idea thrilled me, but only because it was the Lord’s voice. In the morning Nancy agreed, and we did. That seemed to be the Lord’s way of bringing us up-to-date on being financially generous and not loving money or stuff, a tune-up before we moved to Corpus Christi.

We inherited about 600 acres of mesquite, cactus and scrub oak from Nancy’s family in Nixon, Texas – Gonzales County. Then came the Eagle Ford Shale discovery. After almost 20 years of retirement, my retirement funds continue to increase annually. [I’m still a financial midget.]

My new CPA’s testimony – When I asked him what he knew of me from knowing my finances, he said, “You are a very generous man.” That surprised and warmed me. But I want you to know that I have to regularly labor over how to share or not share the Lord’s and my money [“Give to anyone who asks of you” vs. such as, “Don’t feed those who will not work.”], how to give in secret instead of managing to enjoy at least a bit of personal credit, how to not let my left [giving] hand know what my right [holding] hand is receiving, and how to be both generous and wise [how to hear, “Yes” or “No” when hearing about needs].

This testimony today for me is a rare event [to speak openly in public about money] but I was asked to do this by the right person so am letting you hear me blowing the Lord’s trumpet, sort of like the apostle Paul’s bragging on himself and the Lord in his letter to the church in Philippi.

This talk has been about the power of the cross for living. Just as we could not have saved ourselves, neither can we love the Lord, love our neighbors, love those who persecute us, live boldly, or fulfill our destiny in our own strength. To have real life we need to take up our crosses daily and follow Jesus.

In closing: I am so thankful for the Lord’s directions in my life, including financially. In prayer during the night 2 or 3 years ago I said, “Lord, You are so good! You are continually accepting me and giving me Yourself. You continually give me Your life. And You continue giving me this world’s ‘stuff.’ You have filled me with your wonderful blessings. I love You and will serve you the rest of my life. You don’t have to do anything else for me.” But He continues trusting me with His life, money and stuff. And it started 56 years ago with our personal, permanent, full-frontal, irreversible contract. What was the contract? I came to the Lord not on the promise that He would take me to heaven instead of send me to hell; not even on the basis of what He would do for me in this earth-life. Friendships cannot be based on what the other person will do for us, marriages cannot be based on what we can get from the other, so neither can lordships. The Lord brought me to Himself on the offer of His lordship for my sonship, and nothing else.

Allow me to pass along a special word from my Heavenly Accountant: “Help yourself.”

1. I know you. You are involved in improving the earthly political and social aspects of life, but from the heavenly kingdom position and with its methods. You pray and work for the building up of the church, although the spiritual kingdom is your focus. You work and pray for earthly leaders, but your Messiah has already come and He is on the throne of your heart and of your spiritual kingdom. You are involved in and concerned for the kingdom of this world and its citizens, but you are not of it. You are a good citizen of your nation, whether it is democratic or totalitarian, but you obey your Lord and King, Jesus. You are threatened with the fiery furnaces of this life, but not fearful because your Lord is able to deliver you.

See! I told you that I knew you. The Lord knows you even better than I can describe. I’ll pass along His “At-a-boy” and “At-a-girl.” If you will check in with Him, He will tell you the same, Himself.