THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2013

1. I have often wondered who may have first formulated this centuries-old observation: “Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.” It’s no surprise that I find it attributed to a Brit, C. Northcote Parkinson [1909-1993], best known as a naval historian. He derived the dictum from first-hand observations made while in the British Civil Service. This Thought was not a deliberate attempt at British humor.

As a sort of balance, Johann Sebastian Bach [1685-1750], the German composer who needs no further introduction, said, “I was obliged to be industrious. Whoever is equally industrious will succeed equally well.” If taken seriously, that has the potential to stir each of us to be the best we can be. That may not be as good as someone else, but it will be our best.

2. We know that God has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to follow His Son’s example; but how about to enable us to tolerate our fleshly baggage and behavior that is necessarily with us as long as we are here in this earth-life? Dealing with our own sins is a responsibility that Jesus did not have, although He was subject to His flesh’s weaknesses, without sinning. If we don’t faithfully accept our personal limitations, even our sinfulness [1 John 1:8], we can become as intolerable as were the Pharisees.

Beyond our individual problems, the flesh tries to hold us [corporately] back, not only by our sinnings, but by “requiring” among us so many non-essentials of life, worship and fellowship that even our best ecumenical involvements remain at arms’ length to some degree. For us to have fellowship with one another, the Lord requires only our abiding in the light [meaning getting close enough to Him that darkness is no more a threat, a wedge, or any other tool of Satan], which eventually cleanses us of all our sin – 1 John 1:5-7.

3. The streets and shops are all so very crowded this time of the year – Thanksgiving holiday and celebration, buying for Christmas, Christmas time, and the New Year celebration. If you are looking for a place that is not crowded, but is peaceful and rewarding, check out the “Extra Mile Cafe.” See Matthew 5:41.

4. Most of us know how to function within the limits of the boundaries of our temporal reality [submarines under water, cars on earth, airplanes in our atmosphere, rockets in space], and some understand that outside those boundaries exists even more of God’s creation – demons, good angels, bad angels, etc [?]. What are we to make of weird spiritualities being presented in every part of life [movies, books, churches, T-V, etc.] – most of it labeled “for our entertainment?” Do we know how to deal with and relate to those spiritualities?

Our experienced reality is only a small part of God’s creation. There is a larger reality about which Scripture and science teach us much more. Some are transdimensional creatures which, if so, may soften our need to know about intergalactic travels by supposed non-earthlings [they being here already and abiding among us], but increase our need to know about the transdimensional among us. Because of our growing knowledge of these things [and very much more], and realizing that there are evil powers whose purpose is to deceive and hurt us [body and soul], and that we know only some of the untruths which we will be tempted to believe as our times go onward, it is no wonder that the Lord Jesus and Paul warned us – Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:11.

This is an exciting and dangerous time. Stay in the Word, pray for clarity, and don’t stop getting together with knowledgeable and mature brothers and sisters. It appears that it may very well be possible to deceive the very elect. Now is not a time for spiritual flabbiness in our finances, family raising, recreation selections, political involvements, emotional laxity, etc. Shaping-up our souls and keeping them shaped-up is in style in the kingdom.

5. The Lord is a grand creator-scientist. Our bodies are examples of His creativity, of His imagination, of His long-range purpose being worked out, of His commitment, of His love. We have built-in systems that are dedicated to attacking germs [that He also created] that might do us harm. These defense systems have the flexibility to develop germ-specific weaponry. Each time a new germ invades our body our B cells begin intelligent antibody development programs to attack the germs until a successful resistance is developed. Then our T cells remember those invaders so to immediately respond to any later attacks.

That physical example sounds very spiritual, doesn’t it! Recognizing how we fell to temptation the first time we encountered it in a certain form, and being better prepared to fight it the next time, is a parallel act of grace as with those B and T cells. I suppose that all spiritual truths are mirrored in the natural.

6. Jesus asked His Father to allow us to be with Him – John 17:24. The first application of that request had to do with those disciples there with Him. Next it applied to all future disciples. That can be us. We see His glory [the obvious stuff that comes of being God] by faith; they saw it in the natural. It is more blessed to see it by faith than in the natural – John 20:29. When I saw years ago that being with Jesus 2,000 years ago was less blessed than being with Him now, it soothed my longing to have walked with Him while He was here in His own flesh [but did not completely stop it]. In either case, we have the high calling to be with Jesus.

7. In my 83 years I have learned a few things, some of which is that I know only partly and that I only partly apply that which I know. My experience is backed by 1 Corinthians 8:2. Learning that sort of thing has been immensely helpful in my area of the kingdom. At times it has temporarily substituted [without much fall-off] for wisdom, maturity and righteousness.

Will Durant [1885-1981], Christian American writer, historian and philosopher, who believed that the Bible and science were both right even when they apparently disagreed [HURRAY FOR HIM!], said: “One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say.” That fits well with this Thought.

8. You worship leaders are being careful to avoid showbiz in your ministry. The wrong spirit leads us to think that it is “cool” and less boring if you continually spice-up things. It’s the story of the hamster’s wheel if we must be more and more innovative. Don’t fear becoming outdated any more than you fear innovation. A reliable help is for you to focus on true discipleship and what aids it.

While I’m thinking on things I know little about, I’ll add these: Loudness in preaching or singing do not necessarily equate with having something to say or sing or play about. In fact, loudness can be a cover for having little to say, and about things [including truth] having not much value or power on their own. Akin to that, encouragements to “get excited” seem to be more in place with professional cheerleaders at sporting events than in church. Something essential is missing if congregations must be told to get excited.

9. What interests others about you? Those who are disinterested probably do not come around, but those who are interested in you are available for answering that question. Ask them. That’s a safe river to wade in.

If you are an interesting person, you don’t have to search for friends. They come to you, and one interested person leads another to your personally customized well of life – John 4:28-29.

10. Counselors, preachers, parents, et. al., know that you cannot resurrect/recreate someone who has not died. The one who is very much alive to “self” is hard to lead to life. All solutions to his situation must make him feel better about himself. “Repentance” is a bad word. To him, life does not come from death [stopping judging, preferring others, refusing to act upon hurt feelings, serving others, etc.] but from more of himself. So it is with dealing with the flesh while we walk toward maturity.

11. Christopher Morley, [1890-1951], American journalist, novelist, essayist and poet, advised that we should, “Cherish all your happy moments; they make a fine cushion for old age.” I think that makes a lot of sense. It’s good to experience the fruit of our relationships, grown over our lifetimes, some flowing easily and some deliberately -- is it not? Adding to his sage advice is that as long as we are in this body our todays are full and our future is exciting to contemplate.

12. On the day of my writing this Thought Nancy and I are in Houston at M. D. Anderson Cancer Hospital getting more and only “excellent” reports on follow-up tests on my neck cancer. The surgeries, time and dollar expense, radiation therapy, etc. necessarily involved in the process have been rewarded – during and after the process. My check-ups are now extended to 6 months.

One of the rewards occurred during our dinner. Nancy and I were having a nice dinner at the hotel restaurant. I took a phone call and talked for about 10 or 15 minutes to a Christian brother. The topic of our conversation was that it is never good or right to lie, that it always works backwards, and that he should teach that to his family. I talked with my normal phone voice. As soon as I finished my phone conversation, a man arose from a nearby table, walked over to ours, and said in a very definite way, “I want to know more about not lying! Tell me about not lying!” I received him warmly, inviting him and his wife to join us; which they did. They pulled their chairs to our table. We had a long [30 or more minutes] talk about not lying and much more, held hands in prayer, exchanged contact information, and parted. They are from Kansas. The wife is a co-patient at M. D. Anderson.

Not to change the topic one bit: G. K. Chesterton [1874-1936], British writer, poet, dramatist, lay theologian, orator, journalist, literary and art critic, biographer and Christian apologist said something worth digesting and living: “An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered, an inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered.” RIGHT!

Not all of our contacts are so obviously spiritual, but are still enjoyable and productive. At the same restaurant another evening I bit down on a rock in my beans. It was about the size of a pencil eraser. I had already had a pleasant conversation with the madre’d, so decided to extend it a bit. I took my rock to him and told him I had bitten down on it without harm to my teeth, but that my neck had begun to hurt and my right arm would not function. With a smile, he picked up his small trash can and said, “Put it right here” as if that was where the other rocks had been placed. I did, and we had our laugh.

13. Everyone sooner or later admits to a poor memory, and without feeling guilty. Why? Because that confession has within it an automatically exonerating excuse like, “I forgot!” Advanced age helps, too. But, no one admits to a failure in judgment. Why? Because there is no built-in exonerating excuse; only an awareness and confession of self-responsibility. Advanced age is certainly no excuse for poor judgment; just the opposite.

14. Those who are upwardly mobile in their employment know to be cautious when offered a promotion. They know that they can be promoted past their ability.

It is also true that it is dangerous to hold a position that is larger than your character. If so, the longer you remain in position, the more you and those who depend upon you degenerate. At times, either you must resort to force and skullduggery or lose your position. Not good.

15. Knowing Scripture and being able to quote verses is not enough – Luke 4:9-11. It must be lived out in real-life situations [called trials] and trials are no sure producer of good character. Trials may produce strength, humility and compassion or, instead, bitterness and cynicism – Jam. 1:2-4. The negative results are so common that no doubt we all know those who have gone that way, including ourselves.

16. If you were God and wanted to start and to raise up a spiritual family, how would you do it? Would you pick the discontented, the distressed, and those in debt who were running from their responsibilities – 1 Sam. 22:1-2? Would you pick the physically and mentally ill, and the poor – Matt. 11:2-6? How about the weak, the lowly and the despised – 1 Cor. 1:26-31? If we were God, we would go after those reprobates, and would make them into a mighty family of God.

But what about after the selection process? What would be our focus for making them into that which pleased us? Would we endeavor to get a firm commitment from them – Ex.19:7-8? How about fulfilling your word to them by doing mighty deeds year after year so they would trust and obey you – 1 Cor. 10:5 [1-13]? Those two methods are doomed to failure, as the Lord showed us in those verses.

Then what would be our focus when selecting and raising up our family? Answer: Their hearts. That presents us with another problem. The hearts of men are deceitful; so deceitful that we do not know our own hearts – Jer. 17:9-10; Mark 7:21-23. Therefore, since He is the only person who knows our hearts, He exposes our hearts to us by our thoughts and deeds. That’s the purpose of Old Testament and New Testament laws – to drive us to the Lord for changes to our hearts. We must be tempted beyond our human endurance. Our failure to obey Him drives us to Him for mercy and change. That means our focus is to be on changes of our hearts, much more than of our behavior.

Grace is always available for growth [righteousness] instead of failure [sin]. However, grace is available for cleansing and restoration after we sin. Grace abounds. The flesh must be crucified daily as we take up our crosses and follow Him. The flesh is too bad to be cleansed; it must be crucified daily.

17. Do you know of any place in the whole world where someone meets truly for the purpose of meeting with the Lord for His purposes, giving no thought to their own needs, laying down their lives wholly for the Lord’s satisfaction? If “yes,” consider the eternal value of joining them. If “no,” start with yourself. Perhaps two or three others will join you. That’s enough because the Lord Himself will be there with you – Matt. 18:20.

18. “Whether you think you can or whether you think you can’t; you are right.” – Henry Ford [1863-1947], American industrialist and Christian.

19. It’s wonderful how our Heavenly Father allowed Isaiah to overhear His conversation with our Brother, Jesus. In Isaiah 49:8 our Father said to His Son: “Thus says the Lord [that part is Isaiah speaking – ed.], ‘In a favorable time I [Father] have answered You [Son], and in a day of salvation I [Father] have helped You [Son]; and I [Father] will keep You [Son] and give You [Son] for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;’”

That verse was very meaningful to Jesus. It revealed to Him and to us that Jesus came at just the right and most choice time in history, that Jesus had His Father’s word on being saved/helped/kept/and made a restoration/covenant/redemptive gift to humanity. He did not come to give us a new covenant, but to be the new covenant to us. He did not come to show us God’s grace, but to be to us God’s grace. He within us is the Law of Christ written on our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which helps us obey Him. That’s a good Christmas story.

20. Can you imagine something that increases forever; that never stops increasing? I find it easy to imagine something continuing as is forever, but increasing forever is another stretch of the imagination. Isaiah 9:8a tells us that there will be no end to the increase of Messiah’s government and peace.

Impossible! That makes it more wonderful.

21. Let’s think about two verses that are familiar to all of us – John 3:3, 5. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. … Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” We are on a spiritual journey. Seeing our destination and entering it are necessary. It is obvious that being born again of water and of the Spirit is our starting point, not our destination. Our goal is [far] beyond our starting point.

According to Matthew 7:13-14, if our goal was to be born again, we would not need a path after entering the gate. Our goal is out there at the end of the path. Stay on the path and keep going with the Lord. Ours is not a forced march, but Paul described it as being disciplined and intentional – 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:1-2.

22. For the person who does not know Jesus Christ, there is not much to learn. Reading a book or two can give you all the facts needed to be very well informed historically.

For those who know the Lord, there is no end to learning more about Him. Just as we knew things about our parents when we were kids, but kept learning about them day-by-day for years in our adulthood, so it is with knowing Jesus. Spiritual growth is linked with knowing Him better and better.

23. As spiritual, born again beings, how are you directed in life? It seems that the main ways are: 1) By how we have been and so are now shaped, meaning that we have knowledge, memory, a biblically informed mind, and a heart to walk with the Lord – a present and available supply of the past. If Life has already informed us, we have much to go on without being continually re-informed by … 2) The Holy Spirit’s voice as He deals with us daily, and [of course] 3) By the world, the flesh and the devil. That No. 3 is added for honesty’s sake.

24. Thomas Jefferson had been reading Plato’s *Republic*. He said he had to lay it down often, and ask himself “… how it could have been that the world should have so long consented to give reputation to such nonsense as this.” One of those nonsensical things was that there are “noble lies,” meaning that it is the business of leaders to tell lies, deceiving their citizens and enemies alike. That Thought seems pertinent currently.

25. CAUTION: When you try too hard to have fun, you are almost guaranteed to fail.” The same goes for trying too hard to not sin, such as to not get drunk, or etc. The point is that a focus on the negative leads to failure, as does an inordinate effort applied toward something good.

26. What did God originally have in mind? Whatever it was, He still has it in focus as He works all things to that purpose – even evil things. You might have a more “tangible” or “clear” or “meaningful” answer to that question, but here is a suggestion: God planned that everything would be filled with Christ’s life, love and glory. The Non-Createds were and are already filled, and the createds are in the process of being filled. That covers everything. We were created for Him.

We and the rest of the world are not drifting along aimlessly, being influenced by people, places and things. Just as creation has a Creator, observed design has a Designer, supposed chaos has the same Designer, and the ongoing action has a Sustainer.

27. Abraham had Thought 26 and applied himself to live it. He needed nothing more than the Lord and whatever obedience to the Lord brought to him from the riches of heaven and earth – Gen 14:17-24. The kings [powers] of the world were doing what they always do – make power plays to gain control. Abraham was brought into the action because he was his brother’s [Lot’s] keeper. Abraham had disdain, yet compassion, for the world systems and whatever they produced. He wanted no part of it, but that’s where he was, in it – John 17:15-16. So he inserted himself faithfully into the world’s sordid activities for the sake of Lot, and the Lord.

The spoils that had been taken from one world power by another world power were incidental to Abraham. He wanted his brother [nephew, Lot]. He rescued him, defeating the more unruly enemy and setting free others of the world system who were his more compatible “enemies” in the process.

Then he was faced with another temptation – what to do with the spoil? He gave some to those with him who were less mature in faith [Aner, Eschol and Mamre], a tenth more he gave to the “church” [Melchizedek] that had blessed him, and the bulk went to the world power among which he lived. Abraham strengthened the non-believing society that he benefitted from living among – Rom. 13:1-7. Selah!

That which mattered most to Abraham was preserving God’s reputation, not getting rich personally from natural goods. He turned down that which was rightfully his, the spoil, so that God, not the world powers, would receive glory for having made him what he was. He was concerned with God’s reputation, not his own. That sounds like Paul, does it not?

How did Abraham come to the point of being able to reject material blessings from the wrong source? He knew that God was in complete charge of His universe, and that that included himself and all his needs, whether militarily or otherwise. He worked for that God, the One who provided all his needs -- Phil. 4:19 (10-20).

28. The Lord called forth from Abraham his most precious possession – Isaac. Abraham’s response brought him blessings beyond his mental or physical conception. The Magi, who for centuries were king-makers or king-breakers, brought the most precious things they had. It was not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but their worship and acknowledgement that the child Jesus was the Messiah.

What is the most important thing you own? Have you given it to the Lord? How do you know if you have or have not?

Who is the most important person in your life? Have you given him/her to the Lord? How do you know if you have or have not?

Today’s suggested answer: If you are not violating the Lord’s written Handbook on how to be stewards of possessions and relationships, you have probably already given it/him/her to the Lord. But, if you find an instruction in the Handbook that shows you to be out of alignment with the Lord in regards to that valuable thing/person, you probably have not given it/him/her to the Lord. If so, I advise you to go beyond acknowledgement into doing it. Let Him tell you how.

Watch for mental, intellectual, emotional pop-up blocks when you go seriously through self-inspections like this. The Holy Spirit will be assuring or convicting you of your openness to the truth, or lack of it. Checkups at this time of the year are common as we approach December 31st, the Time of Good Intentions, the annual time to commit preemptive perjury and to set-up ourselves for covenant breaking.

29. When Moses and the several million Israelites and their herds arrived at Rephidim it was a terrible situation; there was no water – Ex. 17. “Moses has led us into the dessert to die! After all, he is not perfect, being a man like the rest of us. Worse yet, maybe Jehovah has forsaken us, too!”

At that point it is easy to imagine Moses, Joshua and Caleb moving throughout the camp telling the people, “This is only a test. Trust God. Hold on. He is faithful. Remember that He always did it this way as He was delivering us from Egypt.” But the truth did not stop the babies’ cries for a drink, the wives’ pleas for the men to “do something,” or the men’s challenges to Moses’ leadership. God did give them water, but their unbelief and murmuring placed a restriction on their future with the Lord.

[Question: Would you rather have had water awaiting you or have to go through severe testing of God’s faithfulness? Let your life’s history answer that. As for my history, I have often flunked the test.]

Where was God?! Why did He do it this way? Certainly He could have been “more compassionate.” Certainly, if Moses had been God he would have done it differently. Certainly, if I or you had been God we would have done it differently. How do we know that? Because of our own responses in the pressure situations of our own lives. We do not want the stretch of our soul’s faith that so commonly comes before the Lord responds to situations that He set up for that purpose.

We don’t have to be that way. Our God is alive and present and active. Faith pleases Him but does not persuade Him to act contrary to His best plans for us and for creation. Trust Him.

30. Again, you are exactly like I am [basically and probably functionally]. Success elevates me more that it should because I gladly accept and prolong it. And, failure drags me down further than it should because I too gladly accept responsibility and prolong it, also. Then I hear the Holy Spirit whispering [sometimes it seems like He has to shout], “Beware of your pride,” and “Beware of prolonged shame.” Eventually, a combination of repentance and faith bring me back in step.

Laurence Shames [1951-present], American writer, New York City taxi driver, lounge singer, furniture mover, lifeguard, dishwasher, gym teacher, and shoe salesman [That list , and Winston Churchill’s similar one, should encourage anyone who has failed as much and as severely as they.] said, “Success and failure. We think of them as opposites, but they are really not. They’re companions – the hero and the sidekick.” I know nothing of L. S.’s religious faith, but that is a grand expression in the natural of several Biblical truths – “God makes no junk and has no junk yard.” “God turns all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.” “The way up is by first going down.” “God humbles the proud and exalts the humble.” Others that have been whispered in your ear can be added to this important list.

Success and failure are companions. That’s encouraging. Watch for them being closely paired. Our successes caution us into humility. Our failures encourage us into success.

31. Benjamin Franklin [1706-1790], American founding father, statesman, diplomat, author, printer, postmaster, scientist, musician, inventor, satirist and civic activist, had a lot of good observation on human behavior. He said, “Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain – and most fools do.”

32. Our real problems are not what we do but what we are. When we have committed a sin we know that the Lord works to bring us to conviction and repentance and confession so we can be forgiven and cleansed and restored to open fellowship with Him and man.

In the meantime, another action effective for growth in righteousness is or can be taking place. Jesus told us to take up our crosses daily and follow Him – Matt. 10:38-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:27. The Holy Spirit designs our environment and experiences to give us opportunities to die to ourselves – the reason we had obediently taken up our crosses and followed Him since getting out of bed this morning. To allow ourselves to be crucified on our crosses shows that we love the Lord and hate our flesh, in which there is no good thing – Rom. 7:18 (14-25).

A dead person cannot sin. After the Lord puts His Spirit within us and we accept that we are dead to ourselves and alive to Christ and that ”for me to live is Christ,” our striving in the flesh to behave righteously dwindles and righteousness increases by faith – Phil 1:21.

John the Baptist said the Messiah was coming, and that He would put the axe to the root of the tree, not trim the tree—Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9.

33. When you read or hear that “without faith it is impossible to please God [Heb. 11:6],” what goes on within you? Do you feel good about the current level of your faithfulness? Are you challenged? Do you get apprehensive or depressed? If so, perhaps you are looking at the situation as “your” problem. Instead, consider that your [and every Christian’s] functional faith is God’s “problem.” Only after He has done everything to meet our need for developing functional faith [grace, situations, repeats, patience, etc.], and we have repeatedly held to our unbelief, is it then presented to us totally as “our” problem.

The Israelites got into trouble with the Lord in the wilderness due to their unbelief, but only after the Lord had dramatically and obviously provided all that was needed for developing faith [meaning trusting and obeying] and He had been wonderfully patient with them as they clung to their unbelief. Even at that point He continued providing for them and allowing them to live full lives, doing away with only the ones who had shaken their fists in His face and rebelled against Moses. He is so gracious.

But that leaves me with a Thought. In our lives, as the Lord continues to show Himself present and faithful to His word, what indicator has He provided us so we can determine whether His ongoing grace is “generic” like the Israelites’ daily manna and water for all, the faithful and the unfaithful, or if we are on track to leave our wildernesses and cross over into the fullness of the promises He is offering us in this earth-life, like did Joshua and Caleb and the younger generation? Let’s not do too much navel gazing on the topic, but I think the answer is tied to trusting Him in the ups and downs in which He involves us, while staying on course with the established other things.

34. Satan knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. If not before, he was informed when he heard John the Baptist proclaim Jesus as the Lamb of God and then God the Father announce from heaven that Jesus was His Son.

Thereafter, Jesus having made it onto the level of recognition and self-responsibility, Satan’s temptations were carefully thought out and designed to disqualify Him from accomplishing the work of the Messiah. He found that temptations are unsuccessful against those who are seeking nothing for themselves – James 1:14.

As the temptations continued after Jesus had gotten past the onslaught of those 40 days [Luke 4:1-13] Satan appears to have given up on tempting Him to sin, changing his approach to tempting others to destroy Him. They tried to stone Him [John 10:31], seize Him [John 10:39] and to push Him off a cliff [Luke 4:29]. Just as Jesus was not self-focused or a seeker of self-fulfillment, He was also not self-preservative unless for His Father’s purposes. That means although Satan tried to get Him in trouble with the authorities and the people, hoping they would kill Him, Jesus was immortal until His time. When that time came, He clearly said that temptation no longer had any effect on Him – John 14:30. But it was His time, the time for Him to voluntarily lay down His life – John 10:15, 18.

I hope that you have joined me in applying this Thought on Jesus’ temptations to yourself. We are God’s sons, having our parts in the ministry of Jesus. We are immune from temptation in-so-far as we are seeking nothing for ourselves [that is at least an important factor in resistance to sin]. If we are making progress in personal righteousness, it is not surprising that we come under attack; attacks designed to destroy [ministry, reputation, life, family, etc.] – 2 Tim. 3:12. But we are untouchable until the Lord is through with us. It is best that He be through with us because we have run our course, not because we are no longer available to Him.

35. These THOUGHTS are mailed out to whoever wants them and who continues responding in some way every month. You have seen that some Thoughts are very straightforward and spiritually simple, while others, for understanding and use, require thought and perhaps prayer before they are personally meaningful. THOUGHTS is especially written for believers, meaning those in whom the Lord has placed His Holy Spirit, thereby, among other things, giving the reader personal understanding and application of spiritual things [beyond things simply religious].

Bible-informed and Christianized unbelievers can understand to some depth, but are generally not impressed to action with spiritual truth or its application. When Jesus wanted to conceal His teaching from some and reveal them to others, He spoke in special ways and explained Himself to serious listeners. In some cases, those who do not understand spiritual truth may be theologians and leaders of churches; while those who do understand may be quiet pew sitters.

36. So many of us [Christians] have come out of our own personal pits that it is sometimes easy to get satisfied with as much of the Lord and things that we have at any certain time. We were dead; now we are alive. We were nobodies in this world; now we are somebodies in Christ. We were living in hell and headed for the eternal hell; now we are living in God’s kingdom on earth and headed for the eternal kingdom in heaven. Life is so good that it’s easy to rest, permanently, on a delightful plateau.

Richard Jeffries [1848-1847], British writer, said, “Never, never, rest contented with any circle of ideas, but always be certain that a wider one is still possible.” That plateau rest is possible in anything – business, religion, science, etc. Pressing on for a higher prize was Paul’s goal in this life – Phil. 3:14 [1-21]. By the Holy Spirit he advised his goal for us, too.

37. Christian groups should have a purpose for “grouping.” I’ll mention a few of them: 1) Intellectual benefit, Bible understanding [only] and friendly debate – Luke 246-47; Acts 17:16-33. 2) Ear tickling, to hear and do new and exciting things – 2 Tim. 4:3-4. 3) Companionship, which produces little spiritual growth but is meant for us to enjoy being together and perhaps to get our projects done. 4) Fellowship, to grow together spiritually as in 1 John 1.

You have probably been part of all four types. Are you in a group dedicated to No. 4?