THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2012

1. I hope the holidays kindled the fire of hospitality in your home and lit the genial flame of charity in your heart. Paraphrased from Washington Irving.

2. A free society and the free enterprise system of economics must have the rule of law and a moral culture. If both are functional, entrepreneurs’ minds are set free and investors are encouraged to back them with capital. Next, the marketplace judges the economic value and price of new and improved goods and services.

On the other hand, as in America for the past 75 years, the growing regulation and high taxation of socialism stifles social and economic freedom. What baseball player would risk his career by going to bat with 2 strikes already against him and the umpire being a member of the opposing team?!

It is reasonable that God should have the best idea of how to run a corporate body, especially the body which is His church. He built it in complete freedom. I watch His results among the congregations that are definitely but loosely formed and have minimally-organized worship and other meetings. Then I observe those that are highly organized in all ways. [I think] I see significant differences in joy, self-sacrifice, involvement, simplicity of faith, and Holy Spirit’s freedom to direct life and worship. However, mine is a one-person life and experience in that and all matters.

But, freedom appears to be the best, but slower and most painful, way to go.

3. About 10-15 years ago a study indicated that the power nap offered no advantage over “just keep going.” Like a few other studies I had read during my years of medical practice, I did not believe the report. I had taken power naps [15-30 minute naps] and power rests [laying down and closing my eyes for 2 or 3 minutes] and various other forms of emotional battery recharging [laying in the hammock with Nancy for 15 minutes mid-day] so knew there was more to those reloading practices than medical studies had revealed.

On those occasions when I had gone all day and all night, and could snatch the opportunity to get a 30 minute nap as the sun came up, my day was better for it. My personal assessment includes knowing that the benefits are likely both physical and psychological. Perhaps it was that I could remind myself throughout the remainder of the day that I had had that nap and felt empowered by the reminder.

So, today I see that a new study shows that power naps help medical students stay alert. No surprise that I am not surprised.

My Thought here is that we don’t need to challenge responsible reports or reporters, but all things must be judged. If it passes our judgment, it is because it fits somewhere within the scope of our own knowledge, reason and experience. Some things we should directly accept 100%, others we need to adequately question and put on the back shelf for a while, and others [to be responsible persons/saints] we do not need to accept at all.

4. It seems to me that we are informed and led by the Lord in several ways: 1) God’s recorded word [printed, preached, taught, recorded]. 2) God’s ways [previous knowledge]. 3) God’s whisperings [He speaks to us]. 4) God’s witness within [a biblically molded conscience]. 5) God’s people [if indeed we allow Him to lead us by others]. You may understand other ways of being led by the Lord.

As much as we may prefer to be informed and led in certain ways, and be averse to being led in other ways, the way the Lord chooses to lead us this time is the way of life and liberty for us this time. It may be through the briar patch, but it’s the way today if we are to go with Him.

5. It is the father’s responsibility [whether of a family, a church, or any other social unit] to make practical the beliefs of the family. It is a shame when beliefs have no practicality. It is called hypocrisy. That desired and necessary practicality may be in the face of opposition or some other press against a quality expression of fatherhood. And, practicality may mean fight, flight, or stand still and watch [and be watched].

Jesus did all of that, didn’t He. Now it’s our turn.

6. Why does the Lord allow evil to harm innocents, especially mass evil against mass innocents? Insanity, guns, anger, depression, drugs, etc. – but these are no answers. Could God’s “indifference” on those occasions be an expression of something of Himself that we are missing, or a revelation of something of ourselves, or both? Do we understand what went on in God in regards to evil Cain and innocent Able?

We could come closer to the answer if we knew the Lord better. The answers are there for those who draw close to Him. However, when those answers are shared with the rest of the world, even when shared with the church, commonly they are rejected. Spiritually insightful, scriptural answers do not satisfy the flesh. In fact they inflame the flesh, which then falls back on “free will,” which is no answer to the question of “why does He allow evil to act upon innocents?”

So few are equipped to handle the complexity and wholeness of God’s answers, since humans are determined to be so very earth-only minded. Consider that He is not limited to this world in such as the matter of rewards and punishments. He has eternal considerations that few of us accept as sufficient “excuse.” He is wise enough and powerful enough to have ways to set right the unfair consequences of man’s misuse of free will.

Thus is revealed our carnality, including the carnality we have embedded within our true religion, which preachers and teachers won’t touch even or especially when they begin to have somewhat of a grasp on it.

Every event that crosses our paths is meant to teach us something, to reveal something of ourselves and of God, and to change us permanently and eternally for the better. It may be Connecticut, or cancer, or a sunburn [since we are talking here only of tragedies], but there are no accidents, no incidents that are meant to be wasted. It may be something as simple as sending our kids off to praying schools, not only with packed lunches, but packed with prayers.

7. Is it o.k. to tell overweight friends that they need to lose weight?

8. There is one thing worse than sin, and that is “denial.” Denial gives us no chance when doing our occasional spiritual inventories. What do you do to prevent or deal with your own denials?

9. You will enjoy researching Emperor Antoninus of Rome, especially if you find that which will probably be omitted in most biographies, that he was a friend of the Jews and secretly studied civil governance principles under a rabbi. He was a Roman with character, and humbled himself to learn the more important elements of life, from a Jew.

Many of us learn from the Jews now, and are thankful, but then for Antoninus and now for many of our contemporaries there is a problem that results in great loss. Example: Hitler killed and ran off the very Jews who would have helped him win his war. Many of them came to America to escape his insanity, and devised the atomic bomb.

This thought? Visit a rabbi.

10. Ordinarily, it is hard to be humble when you know you are special. We are told to be humble [or we will be humbled!] and that we are handpicked by the Almighty Creator to be with Him forever. That makes us really, really special. We are special, we feel special, we should feel special, and we should think and act special. That’s part of being a child of our heavenly Father.

Then we struggle with pride. What is the key to your victory over pride? Or, perhaps I should ask, what was the key to your victory over pride?

11. I asked my cancer surgeon if she enjoyed doing the particular kind of surgery she was about to do on my head and neck. Unhurriedly, she eventually said, “Yes, I do. Why do you ask?” I told her that people who enjoy what they do usually do a better job and have better outcomes, and that they are likely doing that which the Lord has called them to do. She agreed.

Our choice of careers certainly does determine how and where we spend a large part of our lives. The right choice means that our work fits us. It taps into our reservoir of potential. We are challenged, which is essential for job satisfaction because we become our best and possibly the best when we are challenged.

Consider the following when searching for your career:

1) Does the prospective career pull you to it? That’s more than, “Does it attract you?” We don’t have to wonder if a cat is attracted to a mouse because the word attraction is inadequate; cats are pulled to mice. In my case, I was almost compelled [internally] to follow the course that led to my becoming a physician.

2) Does the prospective career match the resources of your soul? Our character [and our body] is more suited for certain types of work than for other types.

3) Are you willing to pay the price to overcome known [and always unexpected] obstacles? The price may be time, or energy, or deprivation. It may be to enter, continue or finish the career.

4) Do you desire the career? This is in addition to its pull on you. Desire need not be a deep passion, but we do need to love our work, although perhaps not every aspect of it.

5) Do you have faith [even human faith/confidence] that you can be successful if you continue applying yourself? Confidence in the Lord and/or yourself will get you through many tough times.

You might enjoy replacing “career” with “marriage” in that little list of 5 considerations.

If you want more on this topic, read “Duties of the Heart,” written around 1040 A.D. by Bachye Ibn Pakudel in Zaragosa, Spain.

12. The greatest challenge to Christian faith is not other faiths/religions, but our own faithlessness.

13. More on freedom [I will be thinking mostly of Christians’ freedom in the Spirit, although civil, financial, etc. freedoms are related to spiritual freedom in both root and process. The word “love” may be substituted for “freedom.”]:

1) Why hasn’t freedom endured as it was from the beginning in the church – Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37? Look at the freedom those saints had as they looked beyond self, obeyed the Lord, and loved one another.

2) And why did not freedom continue in such prime places as the church in Galatia – Gal. 3:1-2? Paul really nailed it there.

3) And why now does not that same type and degree of freedom endure and grow in new believers?

4) And why does freedom not continually blossom in me?

Freedom is either wed to a living, growing faith and a body of truth, or it suffers loss. Faith is our always-reliable engine in our many wilderness journeys through sand traps and around crevices. Truth gives freedom its direction; otherwise freedom becomes rudderless, in danger of settling-in as a bitter religiosity – as an old maid whose time has passed and who now lives on memories of her opportunities.

Without the two vitalities of faith and truth, residual freedom soon makes no practical impact. It has root and may yet have remnant, yes, but when it collides with the repetitious simplicities of life, the world becomes “reality,” is too attractive, strong, and deceptive. Freedom can and does wither. We can decide it not worth the spiritual vigilance needed to prolong it until we are out of our present situation.

14. When science and faith [miracles, Bible, etc.] seem to clash, remember to take it easy on science. Science is necessarily limited by its respectable, self-imposed processes. Anything supernatural, anything not reproducible, anything of God’s intervention by the Spirit is not understood by science – and neither should it be.

Science is about things natural. It excludes all else from its databases [databii? ☺]. So go easy on scientists when they have no scientific evidence available to explain things that are experienced outside of our 5 senses and 4 dimensions [3 dimensions plus time]. Besides, science has been helpful to our understanding of things that were formerly thought due to various gods, things like disease and weather.

And, yes, they have proven that there are many dimensions beyond our four commonly-known ones. Let’s not disdain science just because it has a self-imposed blind spot, and limited range of involvement. That would be doing the same to science as science has often done to miraculous things of faith.

15. The church is meant to be the replica, the exact copy, of Jesus. God’s means for producing that result: 1) the same word Jesus had, 2) the same Spirit Jesus had, 3) the same faith Jesus had, and 4) the same commission Jesus had.

Allow me to go through a few verses:

1) John 1:18 – The Man Jesus was an exact replica of God in word, work and character. As Jesus was equipped and sent, so are we. Because no man has seen God, we can know all about Him because He is perfectly and fully revealed in Jesus who was and is available to us.

2) 1 John 4:11-13 – The church can be an exact replica of God. We corporately can be like Jesus and we corporately can do what Jesus did [and greater]. All the equipment of heaven is available to the church, as it was to Jesus. Because no one has seen God, and because few today have seen Jesus, the church is God’s gift to the world for seeing Jesus. The church is the gift that is meant to perfectly and fully reveal Jesus.

3) So, the church’s problem is not that we are not Christians, but that we are inadequately Christianized, not formed/molded/constructed corporately into that perfect manifestation of Jesus. Paul wrote to the Galatian church [4:19], where he had previously labored to form Christ of them using their available material, that he saw the necessity of further labor “until Christ is formed in you ...” We are talking here of their corporate expression of the one man, Jesus, not of any or many individual’s personal expressions.

4) Ephesians 4:12-13 – The “a mature man” is Jesus. The human builders are listed in verse 11. The Holy Spirit’s and Paul’s focus here is that when the world or other churches saw the church of Ephesus they would say, “They are the fullness of Jesus Christ.”

5) If we want a grand picture of a local church being formed into the fullness of Christ, we can delight ourselves in Acts 2:37-47 and 4:22-35.

One way to say this Thought is that common instructions, common faith, common Spirit and common commission produce common life. That is the purpose of our common God.

16. There are two ways to comprehend the presence and purpose of evil in the world, and they can be stated very simply: 1) Evil is independent of God so He needs to be continually at watch in His duty as protector of the faithful. 2) Evil is one of God’s tools and in relation to it He is continually All-Mighty. Of the two, I’ll take the latter, which is scriptural.

17. Why teach our children [and untaught adults] to say “thank you” to God and others? It is true that a grateful person is a happy person, but there is a more important reason than our happiness. When we thank someone we are expressing something healthy; we are recognizing a source of goodness and succor that is outside of ourselves. From childhood, we learn to thank those who did something we could not do for ourselves. We thank the source. When we learn to thank God, we have learned that He is the source of something, which can lead us to the revelation that He is the source of everything and that everything has His purpose. At that point, gratefulness has led us to the threshold of happiness -- faith in the purposes of a loving God.

18. There are times to make a stand. When you [male or female, young or old] find yourself in that place [and it may be a very lonely place] the Jewish sages said, “In a place where there is no man, strive to be a man.”

19. Have you ever wondered how to start and openly base a conversation on God and His word when talking with unbelievers or contrary believers? Of course. Be encouraged by Moses’ example. When he approached Pharaoh, who was a man of many visible and touchable gods, he went directly into talking about God -- the invisible, all mighty, and only living One. No need for us to wonder then about our reception because, as with Moses, the Lord will, at times, guarantee our rejection. God’s reason? Bigger battles produce bigger victories and more obvious glory. O. K.?

May the Lord design for you a prosperous 2013 – definitely in your soul, and possibly in your purse, so that you may share those gifts with others.