THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2015

1. If you were going to measure the “happiness level” of a nation, how would you do it? Happiness is such a transient, shallow, and cheap thing compared to love, joy, hope, etc., and is often so self-centered, but we are and should be thankful when we get it. But how would you measure a nation’s happiness level?

The United Nations’ most recent annual report [2014] uses 5 factors to measure a nation’s happiness level: life expectancy, corruption, gross domestic product, social support, and freedom. You, being insightful, spiritual, and educated, could probably pick 5 better factors, but look at these results. The ranking, starting with the happiest: Switzerland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand, Austria, Israel, Costa Rica, Australia, Mexico, America, #20 UAE, #21 UK, #108 Palestinian territories, #110 Iran, and bottoming out the list are Chad, Guinea, Ivory Coast Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Benin, Syria, Burundi, and Togo.

If you are going on a typical vacation and are going to be a typical vacationer, think about going to a nation in the top of the list. If you are going on a spiritual mission as a member of the kingdom of God, and the Lord leaves the choice to you, the bottom ones are preferred. Go with God!

2. In times like these, remember that there have always been times like these.

3. Time does not heal all things, but it does take some pressure off. But passage of time also allows for entrenchment of things that should have been resolved at the onset or as soon as possible. One’s volume of unresolved, often long-ago problems may not occupy our ongoing thoughts, but they have ways of embedding themselves in hidden places of our souls, then exposing us in ways that surprise us and others in unguarded moments. I have often been embarrassed when I suddenly said or did something that “was not me. “ Of course it was me, but it had come from out of the past, influenced by unresolved issues.

4. If we will allow the Lord to make us nobodies as in Matthew 5:3-12, to make us of “no report,” while we remain united and faithful, He Himself will do things through and because of us that we cannot imagine and may never know about.

5. “If we do not plant knowledge when young, it will give us no shade when old.” – Lord Chesterfield [1694-1773], British statesman. Planting that knowledge, which when grown will have become a forest, is real work but it is better than leaving souls to become deserts without shade when old. Lord Chesterfield also said, “Be wiser than other people if you can, but do not tell them so.”

6. The Quantum Theory cannot be true, but experiments confirm that it works. One of its latest “findings” is that we live in a holographic universe, like those on our credit cards – you can look at the 2D surface and see 3D space. It has been said that only two groups of people understand Quantum Theory: physicists with vast amounts of theoretical training, and young children.

Because of the Quantum Theory, science has developed an instrument that can measure motions a billion times smaller than an atom. With it, data are being collected that is said to prove that we live in that hologram. At least it can be said that we live in something greater [bigger, smaller, dimensional] than we can see. All of this has vast implications, one being that Someone had to have written the code for the necessary software.

As usual, every finding or theory produces many questions such as Who is supplying the energy for the system, what happens when/if the energy is turned off, is this a “shadow” of a higher reality [I will venture the child’s answer to that question. The answer is “yes.”], at the end will things simply cease to be, and how far away is Jesus? Selah. You will enjoy Thought No. 23.

7. “Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burdens behind us.” – Samuel Smiles [1812-1904], Scottish author and government reformer. He also concluded that more progress is achieved by change of attitude than from new laws. That’s two good thoughts.

8. This Thought has to do with the Lord of His church working corporately in His church to turn all things to good for those there who love Him and will yield to Him. Bad things are the only things that can be changed to good. I will let His own example of a “bad thing” be my example, the one He uses in the first chapter of Romans, homosexuality, and show how He plans for the worst to become the best.

Fellow sinners, we all want our own way. Homosexuals want their sexual perversion to be accepted as normal, but a Christian who knows and loves the Lord and His word cannot accept their own or others’ sinfulness as righteousness. Deciding those things is God’s job. Like heterosexual sinners, homosexuals are often not satisfied when personally accepted [loved] if their sexual sin is not also accepted. Their response often comes as attacks on the church through its soft spots: “You don’t love me,” or “You are judging me.” Under that heat the carnal church tends to wilt.

The basic problem we have to deal with here is unbelief [disbelief, suppression of evident natural and spiritual truth, dishonoring God as God, believing a lie] which results in futile speculations, foolish and darkened hearts, the production of fools whom God gives over to their impure lusts and degrading passions, doing what they desire instead of the truth of God’s word, shameless passions, depraved minds, and approval of the same in others.

It is probable that all of us have been touched by the sin of homosexuality, likely in a loved one. Our family has, also. It is important to not get wobbly knees, such as by “softening” to accept homosexuality as “just another alternate sexual lifestyle,” in an errant attempt to be broadminded, loving and accepting of the homosexual person.

It is of equal [but no more or no less] importance to love the homosexual as it is to clarify the truth about homosexuality. Together, truth and love give us a two-legged stool to stand on, not an easy stance until it becomes heartfelt and spiritually natural for us by way of experience.

Sin and wrongheadedness need to be called what they are —sin and wrongheadedness. [Keep reading. I’m working first on the leg of ”truth!”] Those who shy away from the presentation of the truth simply do not have vision [perhaps not yet having its foundation of a broken-heart] to see and speak clear, firm, and sometimes hard truth the right way in its time. Until they come to that, no doubt they are not the ones to speak it. It is necessary to have and to speak God’s clear truth because that truth and sacrificial love always work perfectly together to do what the Holy Supplier of both wants done.

One does not have to be an Old Testament prophet to speak God’s truth, and sometimes to speak it quite bluntly, if needed. Jesus said [Revelation 3:19] “Those whom I love I reprove and I discipline.” He can do that Himself alone, or do it through the church, such as through you. On the other hand, human love and timidity will water down the truth, and attempt to justify doing so by quoting something, again, about “love” and “not judging.” In our weaker times, our wobbly knees hope for the Lord to do the truth-part all by Himself, instead of our being available to be the Lord’s instruments such as we are when feeding the poor, healing the sick, preaching the word, etc. Some ride the fence, a difficult and painful place to be. We endanger ourselves by moving in that direction -- 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

But “the truth” is only half of our righteous response, the other half being “love,” God’s type – Ephesians 4:15. Example: Over the years, my counsel to parents of “testy” teenagers has been; 1) keep loving them in ways that at least when they get through their teens they will be unable to deny that they had been loved while in their rebellion, 2) stay on course, don’t waver from your standards. They need you to be their rock during this hopefully brief time of weakness and failure, and 3) don’t kill them [something like that seems to pass through parents’ heads], meaning in this case don’t destroy their relationship with you and their other life-anchors. In due time they will grow up and get straight again. In Proverb 22:6 we are reminded that He is faithful to bring about a good harvest if we will be good gardeners.

Loving those adults who are committed to sinning should be rather easy, all of us being well-acquainted with our own sins and remembering the iron-like grip of habitual sins. But, staying on topic about the sin of practicing homosexuality, it being one of the current plagues of the world and of the church, as it was of Old Testament Israel, the Lord calls it an abomination, meaning an intensely detestable act – Leviticus 18:22 [24-30]; 20:13. It defiled the homosexual which, if not repentant, required their removal from among God’s people and/or stoning them to death. “Removal from among God’s people” and “stoning them to death” are also Jesus’ instructions to the church, if you rightfully interpret the Old Testament punishment of physical death for the New Testament church as the removal of the Holy Spirit’s functions and promises given at Pentecost. That results in spiritual depravity [spiritual separation and “death”] but does not put the committed sinner on the path to eternal hell.

Jesus gave us the outline for dealing with unrepentant sinners in Matthew 18:15-20. It reveals His love for the sinner, the need for the church to love the sinner, the unending approaches to the sinner, the cleansing action of the entire process on the church and, if necessary, the unrelenting love of the church for as long as the sinner does not repent. And there is even more to it. I will outline those instructions:

[[Note: For an interesting and informative bit of insight into the Lord’s economy, remember that He uses the Lord’s Supper as another cleansing agent on the soul of the church. If we desire to partake of His body and blood, we must first get straight with the Lord and our brother with whom we are at odds, then come to His table.]]

a. The church is made up of redeemed, repentant sinners, none yet being perfect, yet who know that they have the responsibility to judge righteously in regards to themselves, others, and all things by the word of God in the love of Christ.

b. A brother [“Bob”] is ensnared in a recurrent sin, to which he is committed and of which he is unrepentant.

c. Someone [“Henry”]in the church becomes aware of Bob’s problem, what Bob is doing, and that Bob has become ensnared.

d. Henry gets before the Lord, cleaning his soul [attitude, knowledge, plans] of unrighteousness toward Bob and the sin that grips Bob, so he can go in humility as God’s instrument to restore Bob to spiritual health and function in the church – 2 Thess. 3:15.

e. If Henry is successful, fine. If, in due time, he is not successful Henry is instructed to get another person [“Steve”] to work with him for Bob’s restoration.

f. Steve, too, must get before the Lord and come clean in regards to Bob and Bob’s sin.

g. Only then can Henry and Steve go to Bob and humbly try to restore their brother.

h. In due time, if they are unsuccessful, they are to take the matter to the church, meaning either the leaders of the church or the entire congregation.

i. The leaders/ congregation then must get before the Lord and also come clean in regards to Bob and his sin.

j. Then the leaders/congregation join in a loving, humble “full court press” on behalf of Bob.

k. If in due time they also are unsuccessful, they are to relate to Bob as the absolutely unrepentant sinner he is – like the worst of unregenerate society, yet remembering that Bob is a brother, an eternal member of their family. The church gets before the Lord, who is always ready and able to function as the Head of the church, and together removes the blessings and workings of the Holy Spirit in the church from Bob, and begin relating to him as a rank unbeliever. That means Bob is loved, helped, and invited to fellowship in the church, but is not placed in a place of leadership or honor. Compare this to Paul’s word in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-4: “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

You will notice that this process is designed to perfect Jesus’ love in the church through our obedience to the truth. It is designed to do much more than restore the unrepentant brother [and to make him fully self-responsible for his sin before God and man]. It is a [probably frequent] cleansing tool of the Lord in His church. It makes the church responsible for being Christ’s body and for continuing His life on earth. It enables the church to be that voice that is able to give grace to the worst sinner, then say: “Go and sin no more.” It removes the church from being the wimpiest organization in Western society and establishes it as the powerful, life-changing presence of Jesus on earth.

In all of this, we are to make the truth known and are not to back off. The church must always and clearly proclaim the truth. Jesus said, “My word is truth.” And, we must dissociate ourselves from sin, but never keep a fallen brother at a distance. They are not our enemies, but our brothers and sisters. We must run to them and embrace them. After all, is not the church a hospital for sinners; not a museum for saints? The enemy has started a rumor that if we always and clearly proclaim the truth we will not be loving and will drive sinners away from us. Truth and love are not opposites. Together they attract those called by God into His fellowship.

Homosexuals have a problem with God, not with the church. It is He who has established the truth of what is righteous and unrighteous. The church is to stand on the Rock and His word, and will do so unless it [the church] has fallen out of Jesus’ hands into the hands of the church. Wherever it has fallen into the hands of the church it swiftly declines into just another self-directed religious organization.

Understanding and applying the Lord’s instructions to the church as found above in Leviticus and Matthew means that the self-defiled homosexual has an opportunity to be forgiven and cleansed. To work toward that restoration, the penalty is spiritual emptiness [spiritual death], through the removal by the church of the Holy Spirit’s daily grace. Fortunately, there is now forgiveness in Jesus through repentance, which was not available from God through the Law of Moses.

If the church will not obey its Head, the church also becomes defiled, the promises of God will diminish, and its light will go out. The same applies to individual homosexuals -- Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. If the church or individual is repentant, the result will be cleansing and restoration -- Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; 1 John 1:9. God’s word is good; it restores souls. Blessed are those who walk in God’s ways.

9. What is Holy Spirit Revival? Answer: The Holy Spirit sovereignly acting to bring all things and people under the lordship of Jesus Christ, without human intercession or action. However, can a body of believers take action to begin a Holy Spirit Revival? Yes and No. Yes, if they: 1) are ready for a new beginning of obedience to the Lord, 2) are prepared to be part of a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, making the Lord and His love triumph in their hearts and lives, 3) are under a clear conviction of their sin, being aware of the presence and holiness of God, and 4) want Him to completely take over their lives. Otherwise, my considered [but not official] answer is No.

I think that those recorded times of small bands of saints praying for spiritual revival brought it about in that way. Lacking that, the other Holy Spirit revivals appear to have been sovereign acts of God, meaning without previous human intercession.

Therefore, is there any hope for spiritual revival? Our lives are full, whitewashed, and satisfied. We have movies, TV, computers, hand-held electronic communications, parties, vacations, and holidays that are designed to cover our emptiness, dissatisfaction, and boredom – brought on by our lack of fellowship with God and one another. What must happen, other than the Lord Himself starting by an outpouring out His Spirit upon those who are religious but otherwise disinterested in Him?

10. Here is more evidence that the christianization of a society also molds the minds of unbelievers. William James [1842-1910], American philosopher and psychologist, non-practicing physician, non-Christian, reminds us that faith is necessary for “success.” He said, “In any project, the important factor is your belief. Without belief, there can be no successful outcome.” It sounds like he had an understanding of at least the “mechanics” of faith.

11. The more we shape God in our own image, the smaller god he becomes [absence of caps intended].

12. Ella Fitzgerald [1917-1996], American jazz singer, Methodist, said; “I stole everything I ever heard, but mostly I stole from the horns.” She meant she designed her singing around the sounds of the horns in the bands in which she sang [I suppose, my not knowing a thing about singing or music]. That struck me as a good description of how we appropriate habits, thoughts, mannerisms, knowledge, etc. from others. Little, if anything, is original with any of us, which is what for years I have said about each Thought in my THOUGHTS.

13. A new measure of religious life in America shows that the Christian share of our population is dropping while that of total unbelievers is increasing. The drop is particularly pronounced among young adults, but it is in all age groups. The same trends are among all races, both sexes, and the educated or less educated. Those who describe themselves as “nothing” have increased across the board. The greatest losses have occurred in the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches – mostly in the Catholics. Loses were both in absolute numbers and in relative share of the population.

Mainline Protestantism has had the greatest drop in absolute numbers. That group includes the United Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Episcopal Church, among others.

Evangelical Protestant churches have increased in numbers but declined slightly as a percentage of the population. Those denominations include the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, Churches of Christ, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church in America, other evangelical denominations, and many nondenominational congregations.

Christianity, especially Catholicism (by far), has been losing more members through “switching” than it has gained by the same. Evangelical Protestant churches have gained more members than they lost through religious switching.

Hindus and Jews are the most highly educated religious groups.

Those figures are interesting to most of us because they give a picture of the church, of what the Lord is and is not doing, and present us with challenges. Not the challenges that could cause us to “get up and start doing something,” but of whether we will return to the Lord, allow His word to rearrange our thinking, and His Holy Spirit to cleanse and restore us. It all starts with “me” in the house of the Lord.

14. Teachers and mentors of Christian adults, if we are doing our jobs those under us [educationally, spiritually, status-wise, etc.] will become our equals and hopefully surpass us. Actually, becoming our equals in that which we impart to them is enough – Matt. 10:25. In the meantime, we are to always be challenging them. Some of those challenged will fault us because they resent being obviously inferior and having to be taught. No surprise that Jesus encountered those. Others will appreciate the effects of our challenges to them, those effects being “growth and accomplishment.”

15. Anyone who is exempted from the requirements of civilization -- those requirements being at least work, behavioral standards, and personal responsibility -- are ruined, along with the society to which they are subjected and which they are creating. Thus part of the reason for the instruction of 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Therefore, we need not expect governmental subsidies of counterproductive lifestyles to develop them into civilized human beings. They are slaves to the dole. They are “tended to.”

They do not work, so cannot enjoy the fruit of their labors – that’s disastrous! They receive subsidies no matter their behavior – that’s disastrous! If personal property is lost or destroyed, it is replaced by those who granted it in the first place – that’s disastrous! That’s no way to treat a human being and no way to develop a human being. Such people have been robbed. It has become the American tragedy.

Where is the church? What do we say about this? What are we doing to correct it?

16. Here is some modern history that sounds like the Lord and Israel in the Old Testament. Israel dealt a devastating blow to the Arab nations in their Six Days War of 1967. This month is the 48th anniversary of that war, which occurred 19 years after Israel had gained its independence [in 1946] and had become a nation for the first time in 1900 years. Those two warring events, in 1946 and 1967, showed the Lord’s hand on His earthly people [the church being His spiritual people]. In 1967, the Arab nations [mainly Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan] were determined to wipe Israel off the map. They were moving their forces into position to attack Israel simultaneously. Yet, Israel defeated all those vastly superior forces, and in only 6 days.

Israel struck first. In the first 3 hours Israel had wiped out the entire Egyptian air force, on the ground, with the loss of only 1 Israeli plane 2 hours after the attack began. How did that sudden success happen?

1) Unknown to Israel, top Egyptian and Iraqi commanders were taking an aerial survey over Sinai, first ordering all antiaircraft units not to fire under any circumstances between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. – the precise time of the Israeli attack. The Arab commanders did not want to be mistaken for Israeli planes.

2) The Egyptians had 4-plane Mig-21s patrol flights over the Sinai every 30 minutes so they could be aware of any Israeli attack. Their 7:30 a.m. flight did not fly because its deputy commander was delayed at home for “personal reasons” – which was a drinking, eating and belly dancer party for himself and his pilots the night before. It was during that gap in Egypt’s defenses that Israel struck, again being unaware of that letdown of Arab forces.

3) The Jordanian army detected Israeli planes coming in and tried to notify Egypt. But, a mess-up in code words prevented their communication from getting through.

The God of Israel has not forsaken His people. They are being watched over, and prepared for their revelation of Jesus Messiah.

17. Scripture gives us many perfectly clear teachings and theological points. It also gives us shadowy understandings [shadows and types] and [only apparently] contrary points. The Old Testament-minded Jewish mind is like that, as viewed from the perspective of the New Testament mind. Some things are still fuzzy, even to the enlightened and educated Jewish and Christian mind. The Lord has not clearly stated for us all that He has said. Even the enlightened human mind does not grasp it all. So what to do? That which is fuzzy, leave it fuzzy. That which is clear, leave it clear. Don’t twist anything, except when “jamming” together over possibilities.

We can take a hint from Ansel Adams [1902-1984] when he said; “There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept.” He was an American photographer and was speaking of photography, but we will use his wisdom for our spiritual benefit.

18. It has been said that psychology is a watered-down secular version of Christian redemption, with man in the place of God. As much as that is true, psychology should be used sparingly and with discretion. But, psychology has something of semi-scientific benefit to contribute to life in the kingdom of God. Our soul is part of us, and knowledge of our self [soul] is designed to be beneficial.

Paul wrote lots about the soul, and there are hundreds of things said in the Bible about the soul. But, more important than what can be a sterile “understanding of ourselves,” we are most heavily dependent upon Holy Spirit revelation and biblical teaching, which give us God’s understanding of ourselves. As psychology works within that authority, it can be life-giving.

Our character is not understood and developed from the power of correct and positive thinking, nor in being told that we are really O. K., nor by the latest popular book on psychology. They can be helps. We are brought into the light by faith in the God of grace.

19. The Religion Clause of the First Amendment reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” What does that say? It says more than Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. It says: “It is self-evident that the power of government does not extend over the subject of religion, thus such is written into this constitution.” Religious institutions are exempt from taxation, not by the grace of tax codes, but by the grace of God.

20. I expect to be more tolerant of, a better listener to, and a greater helper of those who are disciples of Jesus, having read several things that Matthew heard Jesus say, and that the Holy Spirit reminded him to write. In the tenth chapter, Matthew wrote about discipleship. He gave us Jesus’ instructions to disciples, reminding them that their lives and ministries would be difficult. He clearly defined their job and [obscurely] listed some of the heavenly benefits to those who would receive Him through disciples’ ministry. Notice in verse 42 that Matthew and the Spirit call those who qualified as disciples, “little ones,” or “humble ones.”

As the end of His earthly ministry neared, in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 Jesus spoke about His return. In 25:40 and 45 He again referred to His messengers as “the least of these.” Perhaps that phrase is meant to cover all of His disciples, not only those first disciples. If so it becomes my job to decide which Christians are disciples [by the standards Jesus taught, a necessary and carefully approached project, such as wolves in sheep’s clothing, false prophets, and knowing them by their fruit], then to relate to them accordingly. That’s the sort of thing I have tried to do over the years when making financial contributions or otherwise relating to various Christian ministries. In the process, I have omitted some well-known names and contributed to some very obscure ones.

Before leaving the topic of “little ones,” take some time to consider that the “little ones” of chapter 18, verses 6, 10, and 14 are disciple-ministers of the gospel, not the little child that He brought before them for example in verses 2-3. The child is so embedded in us as being the “little one” that you may need to mull over [pray, think about, chew on, re-read] it for a while longer. It seems that all of these “little ones” are Jesus’ disciples as they/we go about serving Him.

Have you noticed how difficult it is at times to be a “little one?” An attitude of bigness would come easier, but grace abounds.

21. There is a great difference between belief and faith. Belief is a matter of the mind, by which even the devil and his demons believe in the persons of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – yet remain unchanged.

Faith is a matter of the heart, by which we trust in the work of Jesus unto salvation – through which we are changed into His likeness.

22. Some of you remember being in such close fellowship with other saints that whatever you possessed was theirs and whatever they possessed was yours. In my case, that meant houses, cars, money, time, etc. – without measure and with no holds barred. Perhaps you still have those relationships.

If you do have that sort of heavenly family life, or at least can recall it with fond remembrances, I’ll make a not-so-wild guess that your possessions were not the only things that were shared. In order for that lifestyle to work, your lives [ways of living and behaving] were also subject to the other(s). That was our Father answering our Elder Brother’s prayer as written in John 17 -- one of His ways of making the kingdom of heaven evident on earth.

But there is another area of sharing in God’s family – the sharing of our souls. That means having a depth of openness that is uncommon even among natural families.

Can you imagine what would, did, and does happen when even one of the community of saints does not live that prayer, but the others do? Chaos! Like, “I want to share in that which you have, but don’t tell me how to live my life.”

How is that going in your branch of our Father’s family? All of this also applies to natural families, not only spiritual ones.

23. Just in case the previous 22 Thoughts have been boring, here is a stimulating offering. Albert Einstein described one of the key principles of quantum mechanics: entanglement. Entanglement occurs when two particles become related such that they can coordinate their properties instantly even across a galaxy.

Quantum mechanics is now being used to construct a new generation of computers that can solve the most complex scientific problems – and unlock every digital vault in the world. These will perform in seconds computations that would have taken conventional computers millions of years. They will compromise every bank record, private communication, and password on every computer in the world – guessing those numbers almost instantaneously.

The race to build quantum computers is on, and it appears that the leaders are IBM, Google, Microsoft, start-ups, defense contractors, and universities. These computers will change the balance of power in business and cyber-warfare. This technology is the equivalent of a nuclear weapon. Rather than doing computations sequentially as classic computers do, quantum computers can solve problems by laying out all of the possibilities simultaneously and measuring the results instantly. Simply and somewhat inaccurately put, that’s like being able to open a combination lock by trying every possible number and sequence instantly and at the same time.

A Canadian company has already developed a rudimentary quantum computer that can perform more computations simultaneously than there are atoms in the universe [read that again!]. Advancing technology creates headaches, and certainly this does also – especially in the area of cryptography. No computer system worldwide will be safe. It took 5 years for protection standards to be developed for present-day computers; how long will it take to develop them for the quantum computer? We are already behind.

24. “I just invent, then wait until man comes around needing what I have invented.” – R. Buckminster Fuller [1895-1983], American architect, Unitarian, systems theorist, author, designer, inventor, and poet. That defines a person who cannot stop being what he is. The church has many of those. They cannot stop behaving like the sons of God that they are, and fulfilling their “day’s work” before going home.

25. “We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated.” – Maya Angelou [1928-2014], American poet, Baptist, dancer, actress, singer, prostitute, cook, and increasingly successful and righteous person over the many years of her life. Her life’s progress mirrors that quotation. But many of our lives do not magnify our successes, as did M. A.’s, perhaps only because we are smaller and more obscure people. We are not to fret, knowing that the most meaningful records are kept accurately in heaven where small, quiet victories add up.

It is reasonable, at least common, for saints to look at our little lives, the losses sustained in order to follow Jesus, the pains endured in order to love those less fortunate, and begin to wonder “why?” “Why, Lord, don’t I have more to show from my life with you?” In the natural, and to say it simply, “If the Lord wanted me to serve Him, and this is all I have to show, was my life so unproductive? It was a lot of time and labor for almost nothing.”

The most humble saint is one who has given up his need to see [at least, for others to see] measurable success or to receive due credit in order to stay on course, knowing that Jesus Christ is with him, has made notes, and will not forget his faithfulnesses. So, our encouragement is to let go not only of the old ways of behaving but also the old ways of thinking. Embrace the truth; drop our little-thinking, step into grace -- out of narrow self-evaluations, into divinely appointed service. In short, relax! We are princes of the King of Grace. He evaluates us little folks better and probably higher than we can imagine.

26. Thomas Jefferson believed in a god, the God of the Bible, but did not accept the New Testaments’ testimony of Jesus. In fact, he actually cut and pasted the New Testament, not with a computer, of course, but with razor and glue. He cut out all references to Jesus’ miracles and resurrection, thereby leaving only that which he believed. When he was elected president he beat a firm believer in Jesus Christ, John Adams, and Baptists rejoiced! Why? What was the common cause that united Bible-believing Christians with a deist instead of with a devout Bible believer -- who in turn would be elected the next president?

The answer, and it is a good one for us to hear, is that those Christians regarded governmental development as a process. The revolution was only one step in that process. Freedom of religion was another step. Jefferson was the architect of constitutional religious freedom so they backed him as a part of nation-building. During the presidential campaign his religious opponents attacked him as a heretic. When he became president he failed to proclaim days of fasting and prayer, but he wanted the free exercise of religion to flourish in America, and applied himself to establishing it. To him that meant that all citizens were to have religious liberty.

The voters picked the right man. His defeated opponent, John Adams, was in due time elected president, perhaps to strengthen Christianity in America after freedom of religion had been affirmed. Good for the Baptists and other believers who had understanding and vision. Will the same among us now again stand up, looking for the basics and voting with vision instead of for what looks, feels, and sounds good for “me today?”

27. “Bravery is being the only one who knows you are afraid.” – Franklin Jones [1908-1980], American journalist, humorist, and public relations executive. Adapting that to Jesus as He set His face like a flint to go to the cross [and to disciples who carry their crosses], “Commitment means being the only one who knows you would rather not.” And, “Love is being the only one who knows the evil secrets about someone, as you step forward to be the first to help them.” And, “Self-control is being the example of stability and action while you are all shaky inside. “ You can devise more. Thank you F. J.

28. The definition of and revelation of the “kingdom of God,” or “kingdom of heaven,” has been progressively revealed to humanity. God’s kingdom began when God began, then began on earth when earth was created, and was referred to in the Old Testament as “His kingdom” and “Your kingdom” [but not as “the kingdom of God,” or “kingdom of heaven].

The reason for the non-use of “kingdom of God” was probably that the Jews considered the word “God” too holy for human utterance, so seldom used it in conversation or contemporary print. However, it appears that Jesus [being the Son of God Himself] was not reluctant to use the word “God,” including the term “kingdom of God.” Mark, Luke, and John recalled and recorded Jesus as having used only the term “kingdom of God,” never resorting to “kingdom of heaven.” But Matthew used “kingdom of heaven” almost exclusively, his gospel being written for the Jews.

The kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven was given to us to differentiate it from the kingdom of man or of Satan or of this world. By “kingdom of God” we understand more than the “geographic” expanse of God’s territory or realm – that expanse being all of creation and non-creation. In Christ Himself we were given a perfect and full picture of the kingdom of God on earth, as it will come in individuals. The personal presence in that coming fullness of expression of the kingdom of God on earth is promised to all believers.

Since Jesus’ departure faithful believers experience, and are given to the world as the display of, the kingdom of God. They are possessed by God’s love and are pursuant of Jesus and His teachings. Their souls and lives display His nature and works. Thus, they are the current, imperfect, incomplete “by faith” manifestation of the kingdom of God.

The next stage in the manifestation of the kingdom of God will be during Jesus Christ’s 1,000 year reign on earth with His believers. All of earth’s inhabitants [those yet in their natural bodies and those who already have their spiritual bodies] will be properly relating to and aligned with King Jesus, presenting the maximum possible evidence of the coming spiritual kingdom of God on earth while He yet has to use some natural-bodied people.

The ultimate presentation of the kingdom of God on earth will be when God Himself comes to dwell on earth in New Jerusalem among those only having spiritual bodies. That’s where we are headed. That’s home.