

Looking Forward

Don't you just hate it when someone tells you the end of the movie? Especially if it's a good spy thriller or suspense movie with all kinds of twists and turns. I have decided that life is a lot like that suspense movie. There are times when you really want to know how things are going to turn out. I remember my college days when I was constantly asking God what he had in mind for my life. Now let's just say I would have had a revelation that told me, "In 20 years from now you will have seven kids." I think my reaction would have been one of fear and foreboding. I might not have even wanted to continue on that course. I might have tried to take control away from God and done something to prevent that from happening. But yet, from where I sit now, I cannot imagine life without my kids. They are the single most important blessing(s) in my life! As our life unfolds like the pages of a good book, God leads us into understanding; of His purpose and will for each one of us. If we were to know too much too soon, without the understanding, we might not think God's will was best. I, like Epaphras, am "wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." Colossians 4:12 Because it is about maturity. As I become more mature, I am more willing to let God have the reins of my life and to follow wherever He may lead. But it is a constant struggle and I am only a little better at it now than I was 20 years ago. But when I am able to let God have the control, WOW, what an exciting ride! Better than I could have ever planned. And just those little glimpses into what God can do make me want to follow Him all the more. May You see the Goodness of God in the path that He has marked out for you! Rudy

God in a Box

It seems that the majority of the people out there disagree with me on one little point. So I am going to try to clearly state my position, then please, let the emails fly! Most people are willing to admit that God is interested in the big picture of our life; that He has a "plan" for life's major highway. But, almost without exception, people that I have talk to think God is not interested in the details. What it makes me think of is that especially we in the "western" world are prone to put God in our little boxes. As long as He is working in the direction we want to go, then it's all right to say He has a plan. But better not let Him to far in, like any of the details; that might get too personal. Well, I think God is a God of details. I think He wants to be involved with every facet of our lives. No, there's not a verse that says, "God wants to be involved in the details of your life." But, I will share with you some of the verses that I think say it even more clearly. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29-31 "For in him we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28 "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb." Psalm 139:13 "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Matthew 6:31-32 I think some days we get a little carried away with our own importance; as if by our own strength of will we can cause it to rain. The fact is that God "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Matthew 5:45 It is important that we not put God in a box of our own making. He is God, and He loves us more than we can even comprehend. May the God who created the Heavens and the earth dwell in you and bless you richly! Rudy

Pride

The Old Testament lesson for yesterday was about a guy named Naaman. (2 Kings 5) Not only did this guy have leprosy, but he also had a good dose of pride going on. When he finally shows up to Elisha to be healed, Elisha doesn't even come to the door to meet him. Instead, he sends a servant to tell Naaman to go wash in the Jordan seven times to be cured. Naaman goes ballistic. His pride expected the prophet to at least come out to him and maybe wave his hands and do a little magic. Thanks to some level headed servants, Naaman does get healed; finally, in spite of himself. I wonder how often God warns us about our pride and we don't even listen? Some times I think we're too busy listening to our own reports about our own greatness to bother listening to God. So let's listen to King David for just a moment on the subject of Pride."My heart is not proud, O Lord,my eyes are not haughty;I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.But I have stilled and quieted my soul;like a weaned child with its mother,like a weaned child is my soul within me.O Israel, put your hope in the Lordboth now and forevermore." Psalm 131Let us all still and quiet our souls and put our Hope in the Lord, both now and forevermore. Blessed be the name of the Lord!Rudy

A Foothold

How many of you still brush your teeth just like your mommy taught you? Most of us know the cause and effect of the whole cavity thing. Even though it takes a number of months after you stop brushing your teeth for a cavity to make itself evident, we still keep brushing. Because we know if we don't, sooner or later we will get a cavity. So why do you think that people don't get the cause and effect relationship between drawing away from God and Satan getting a foothold on one's life? Sin is like the chocolate Valentine's Day candy that some of us got yesterday. The difference between that candy and sin is that every one of us has sin. And it can rot us to our very core. Satan can get a foothold into our lives and just have a gay old time running us every way he wants to. BUT, we know that Jesus can cleanse us from that sin and allow us a life out from under the slavery that it represents. So why, if you are battling the decay of sin, would you pull away from your Christian brothers and sisters? Why would you start skipping church and slowly withdrawal from everything that has to do with Christ? Instead we should run to the cleansing power of the cross. It is the only thing that has the power over sin and Satan; the world and our flesh. To look anywhere else for cleansing would be like shinning our shoes to get rid of our cavities. "The righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." Romans 3:22-25 Each one of us are stuck with sin. Don't let it get a foothold, instead embrace the Cross of Christ and through His blood be cleansed from sin's decay! May the assurance of forgiveness rest on you today! Rudy

"Whatever"

I don't know for sure how this little saying of "whatever" got into our house but I'm becoming more and more dismayed by it. It has now filtered down to Noah, my precocious 5 year old. When he says it, it usually follows a direction or correction that I have given him. And what it says to me is that my direction doesn't really matter. That in their opinion they could either do it my way or keep doing it their way. A change wouldn't really matter. Now from my perspective, if I have told them to change, that means I think the change is important. And the word, "whatever" is a slap in the face. Lately, I have been hearing a lot of "whatever" kind of comments when it comes to sin. The concept is that we are all sinners and we are going to sin and grace covers the sin, so "whatever." Now I agree that we are all sinners, and I agree that grace covers sin. But I think we should strive with all our might not to sin. Paul says it this way, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Romans 6:1-2 Now, after we have sinned, don't beat yourself up with guilt, take it to the mercy seat of God and bask in His grace. But, repentance implies a willingness to change. To change one's actions and one's heart. That's where we must strive not to sin. Grace is for the backside of sin. Grace is not for the front side; the "I'm getting ready to sin" side of sin. When we are on the front side of sin, look at the law. And strive with all your might not to sin! May God give you the strength not to sin. And may His grace be a soothing balm to a troubled heart! Rudy

It a matter of faith

"And we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28 I was talking with a young man last night in youth group. He was sharing with me how angry he was. When I asked him why, he shared with me a story of broken bones; screws in his leg; and not being able to be the captain of his senior wrestling team. Now to a senior in high school these things are huge. I don't want to minimize that. In fact, to all of us, when we think life isn't treating us fairly, we get angry. Many times that anger is directed at God. This young man and I talked about Romans 8:28 and the promise that God has given us. When we are in the midst of life's struggles it is very hard to look with the human perspective and see how all things might work for our good. Sometimes it is so difficult, to even mention the possibility seems ludicrous. These are the times when we simply have to accept the promise of God for what it is - TRUTH - and trust in it by faith. Many have suffered much more than just broken bones or dashed hopes. It is at those really low points of life that faith in God's promises can mean the difference between hope and despair. We must believe these promises now in the face of broken bones and lost dreams. We must have faith now, because it is in the little trials of life that God builds in us strength to endure the big ones. May God continue to build in each of you the faith that endures and will carry us through this vale of tears!

Rudy

Follow Your Heart?

I got to enjoy a wonderful little mini retreat with some of the Senior High Youth this President's Day weekend as we headed to the high country to sled and snowmobile, (and dig out stuck Jeeps.) As we were warming up around the wood stove, someone asked the question if was wrong to 'follow your heart'? So we talked a lot about the influences of the world and the way God talks to us; His Spirit to our reborn spirit. It is interesting to me how Paul uses the same kind of metaphor. In his introduction to Ephesians, he tells them that he is praying for them. "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe." 2:18-19 So we too, should pray for the "eyes of our hearts to be enlightened." What a wonderful image of God communicating to us. And Paul specifically wants us to know the "hope," "riches," and "incomparably great power" that we all have as believers in Christ. As I start the devotion each morning, I "pray through the list." As I was praying this morning I was aware of the time that it takes now that the list is getting longer. I am almost certain, however, that the prayer time is more important than any words that I might write here on this page. So be assured that you are being prayed for by name for "the eyes of your heart to be enlightened" to all that our great God has in store for you! Also be assured that our Great God is faithful and hears both my prayers and yours. Not only does He know your name, but he knows your inmost fears and concerns. He knows exactly how your heart needs to be enlightened. So should you follow your heart? Yea, sure, ya betcha -- right after you pray! May our Almighty Father open the eyes of your heart today and always! Rudy

"Not from yourselves"

I remember sitting in a room years ago with an employee who had come up against "the wall." The wall I am talking about is that point in time when you realize that you indeed are a sinner, and that if God was truly a just God, all you deserve is to be thrown away like yesterday's garbage. It is a wall that we all must face. For it is through recognizing our sin that we realize that we need the grace that God offers us. Satan tries to use that wall to beat us down. He tries to tell us that our sins are so bad that even God can't forgive them. That is one of the supreme lies from the father of lies! Paul tells us the Truth in Ephesians 2:8-9; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God -- not by works so that no one can boast." Now I must admit, I was not comfortable in that room so many years ago listening to the confessions of that employee. That's because I am still using the world's measure of the bad stuff. God, on the other hand, can't be shocked by our confession. Earlier in the same chapter of Ephesians, Paul says, "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved." (3-4) God knows the depth of our depravity, and in spite of it, He still loves us! Praise God for His amazing Grace! Don't work for it -- just accept it! Rudy

On the Road

Yesterday, as I was giving Noah a ride to preschool, he said in a perfect grown up voice, "Dad, I don't understand grace. Would you explain what grace is?" I was pleased with his desire to understand such a deep concept, so I tried to give a definition of grace acceptable to a 5 year old . Then as I talked with the high school youth group last night, there was a lot of judging of other Christians as being judgmental. In fact, a number of the youth said that they would prefer to have non-Christian friends over Christian ones. But really Noah's question about Grace and the youth struggling with the concept of unconditional love--loving the person without judging them for their sin--are really just different levels of maturity grappling with the same question. The truth is that we are all on this road of life and we are all at different places in our own personal growth as well as Christian maturity. Paul says this in Ephesians 2:22, "And in him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." The phrase "are being built" is important. It is a process. And not any one of us are at the same stage of construction. God is still working on each and every person. We must strive to understand the deeper concepts of God's Word and then strive to put them into practice in the way we live our lives. As we are guided by the Great Architect, our lives then take on the shape of a well designed dwelling and a place for God to accomplish His work. But without God's Word and His Spirit our lives can look like a rundown old shack with no design or purpose. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." Psalm 127:1 May the Spirit of the Most High God live and dwell in you richly! Rudy

My Will vs. His Will

I want to ask you a question, well maybe several. Why did God ask Joshua and all his fighting men to walk around the City of Jericho? Why do you think that Josuha obeyed? Couldn't have God just had the walls fall down on the first day instead of having them do it for seven days? Then why seven times on the last day? OK, maybe some of these questions don't have defendable answers, but maybe you have some ideas. Let me share with you one idea. Joshua did it because God said to do it. And maybe God said to do it that way just so Joshua and all the children of Israel would have a chance to show that they could trust God and not themselves -- and OBEY! Are there times in our lives that God asks us to trust Him, in a seemingly senseless course of action? Could it be that God wants us to trust Him and not our own wisdom and intellect? At least at certain times? Now I can already hear the objections. "God gave me my intelligence to use it, not to just go about doing dumb things, and saying God will make it work." And yes, I agree that most of the time God expects us to reason things out and to use the brain that he gave us. But, are there times that God still wants us to do what He says just because he said it, and not because it makes sense? Of course, you can tell that I think there are those times that call for faith and not rational thought. How are we to know those times? Well, I am still working on that. But let me give you an example of a simple one. Jesus tells us, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ... For your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:25, 32-33 This is something that we should just do. Why? Because God said so, that's why! But how many of us are all wrapped up in the cares and worries of this world, especially when it comes to money. That's just one example of what I'm getting at. I am sure you can think of many more. Sometimes the only reason we have for why we are doing something is because God said to do it, and I'm here to tell you that that is OK! May God bless you in your actions today! Rudy

Frozen Chosen

I have recently taken over the Wednesday evening meals that our church serves and I am still getting the hang of how much to buy. Last week I over bought on chicken. So in my quick thinking little brain I decided that we could use the extra chicken to serve last Saturday when over 80 of our youth "broke the fast" of the 30 hour famine that we were hosting. We always buy extra food for the "feast," so I thought I could use up the chicken there. Well, there's a little saying about the best laid plans. When my wife came in on Saturday afternoon to prepare the chicken she found that it had all been shifted into the freezer and was as hard as a rock. It seems that I had not shared my plans with anyone at church, so the business manager had just assumed I had spaced it and put the extra chicken in the freezer. The way I'm going to apply this little story is this. We may have all the best plans in the world to put our faith into action. We may have studied the Bible and have our action plans and strategies all laid out. But we have to be ready to be used when God is ready for us. If we are frozen by our worldly cares or our busy schedule when the Holy Spirit needs to use us, then we are just as useless as that chicken. There will be no way to get us ready in time for the use that God has called us for. Now for the "feast" we just ordered Dominoes Pizza. And if God calls us and we are not ready, He will call someone else, of that I am sure. I pray today, that when God calls us into service, he will find us ready to work, not frozen into inaction by this world. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of every one who believes." Romans 1:16 Praise the name of Jesus, who keeps us thawed and ready for action! Rudy

Be an Example

This devotion was originally meant to go to college students, to try and keep them connected while away in a strange place. But, it has grown well beyond that. But today, I think I need to write to those college students again. It's entirely possible these words might have broader applicability, so if you "other than college students" care to read on be my guest. I do remember being in college. Young and full of ... something that often set the teeth of older people on edge. I like to think it was enthusiasm. And as I look at my college class maybe it was. But I think, many times what offends older people is Potential. You are so full of potential! And as we older people look at you it may remind us of all our hopes and dreams that we haven't fulfilled. It may remind us of mistakes that we have made in our life that we would do over again if we had the choice. I count many of you as my friends. And I have learned a great deal from you. So recently, when I was reading a letter written by an older man to a young wippper snapper, I was grabbed by the words. And felt strongly that each one of you needed to hear them. So, listen carefully. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (1) Each and every one of you must realize that you have a choice in front of you. You are an example to young and old alike, that is not the choice. The choice is what kind of example will you be. Just because you are young does not mean that you have nothing to offer to us older people. In fact, it is just the opposite. In you I see clarity of purpose. I see a genuine desire to light the world with the love of Christ! It is a fire and enthusiasm that you must share with us older people whose purpose may have dimmed with the passage of time. It is a noble and worthy calling! Help us -- help the world -- to regain the Passion! May Jesus, the Lord and giver of all, keep you strong and passionate for Him! Rudy(1) Paul was writing to Timothy, we have it recorded in 1 Timothy 4:12.

A Safe Place

Hebrews 13:1-2 says, "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." It's funny how lately this concept of a "safe place" has been coming up just about every where I have been. We are talking about it as a church staff, we are trying to create one for visitors who come to church and last night it came up at our family devotions around supper. It seems that our children are beginning to realize that the world can be a harsh place. A place where people don't always treat others with the honesty and care that we receive at home. Whoever wrote Hebrews, (I think it was Paul) wants us to create that kind of safe place in the small part of the world that we can influence. He tells us to love each other as brothers; those are the people we know. Then he tells us to treat the people we don't know as if they were angels. I'm not sure how we are supposed to treat angels, but I would guess there would be a fair amount of respect. We would probably even offer to buy them lunch. So the picture we get, of at least the world that we are to influence, is one of love and respect to everyone around us. Both those we know and those we don't know. How about it? Could we try to make the world a safer place, at least the world that we can influence? Try it today. It's been a while since I gotten a lot of email, so... Try it today and then let me know if anything seems different. We might gen up some great stories! May the Lord of Love show you how to share that Love today! Rudy

"The Poem"

Last night our Sr. High Youth group participated in a wonderful exercise of group poem writing. Divided into six different groups, they were given different Bible verses to summarize into one line of a poem. Then we put it together, without any additional editing it is presented below to the Glory of God and for your reading enjoyment. I cannot hide my heart from You, No distance is great enough to keep me from You, When I walk and when I talk, You watch over me. Regardless of our importance to man, we are invaluable to God. Because I was created just like You, You are my all in all. We are His children and in Him we do all things. You speak to me and knew me from the start; You will be my guide. You knew me before I knew myself, and to You goes all my hope and praise. I was created in Your eyes before anyone on earth saw me, In one image You made me and placed me, Your creation overwhelms me. You knew me inside and out before I ever entered the world. My Creator, My Strength; all that I have is by your hand. Our misrepresentation of You has brought You shame, but You bring Truth! God's Love is indefinite; God loves us to infinity and beyond. The blessings of heaven surpass all earthly gifts. Therefore strive to be like Him; for there is no higher goal! May the Lord Bless You and Keep you now and forevermore! Rudy

The verses were; Ps 139:1, Ps 139:2, Ps 139:3, Mat 10:24-31, Gen 1:27, Acts 17:28, Jer 1:4-5, Eph 1:11-12, Ps 139:15-16, Acts 17:26, Ps 139:14, Ps 139:13, Ps 71:6, John 8:41-44, 1 John 14:16, 1 John 3:1, Mat 7:11, Mat 5:48.

The "Braces" of Life

I was fortunate enough not to have to endure the pain of braces during my teenage years, but I am sure many of you know the discomfort of the orthodontist checkup. The whole concept of braces; putting pressure on the teeth so that they move into the place where you want them; seems really painful. I wonder if the idea was first thought up as part of a dark ages torture chamber exercise. Anyway, I am sure that many of you are living on the back side of braces and are very thankful for your parents and their insistence in getting you to those checkups. I think that life is kind of like braces for your soul. I think the pain of this life gently (sometimes not so gently) molds us to the place where God wants us. Peter tells us, "though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." 1 Peter 1:6 So as this world is putting the screws to you and poking and prodding you, let your faith in God soar! He is the one who loves you and cares for you. He is the one who pierced His only Son so that we might join the whole family in the greatest reunion of all. It is by His sufferings, of which we perceive only a glimmer, that we are included in the great victory feast! Praise the Name of Jesus! May the God of Love give you the faith to endure whatever this world can throw at you! Rudy

"Of the Spirit"

Our house is situated "in the pass" and within five miles of our house the elevation changes from 6,000 feet above sea level to 10,000 feet. We sit at about 7,500 and at vortex central. Last night the wind blew. I think it gets going up there at 10,000 feet and talks to it's little wind buddies and heads right for our house. There are certain sounds our house makes, and I know them all, that let me know how fast the wind is. Last night, I am sure we topped 90 mph. Well, anyway, I had a lot of time to think about the wind. In our scientific society, we even have some reason for why the wind blows. We can even predict it, sometimes. At times we might even harness it to do some of our work for us, but we sure can't control it! That concept gives me one little insight into the following verse. Jesus is talking to Nicodemus and says, "The winds blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." For some reason, I been involved in several discussions about how the Spirit is working in peoples lives lately. It never fails that for some reason it's not going exactly the way the person wants it to. I've even been guilty of trying to tell God that it's time to do this or that. But just like I had to just sit and listen to that mighty wind last night, I must accept when God wants to send the wind of His Spirit through my life. Neither can nor should I control it. But when it shows up, it is a most powerful force! I love it when the Spirit gets a hold of a person. It is wonderful to see the changes the Spirit makes! May you prepare your life and build it on our Lord Jesus Christ so you will be ready for His leading! Rudy

Picture This

Picture, if you will, a mirror that every time you looked in it you saw your last sin, portrayed before you as a manifestation on your body. Maybe if your last sin was a lie your tongue would look red and swollen and hang out of your mouth. Or maybe your nose would grow like Pinocchio's. After a couple of encounters with the mirror, my guess is that you would stop looking into it. You might even alter your daily routine to avoid the area where this mirror was. That is the natural inclination of man. To hide the dark deeds of one's own actions from both other people and oneself. But through the cross of Christ we have the supernatural ability to face those sins and give them over to God for cleansing and restoration. But it does need to be done. Jesus says, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John 3:20-21 Think of the light of Christ as an ever so gentle but powerful laser that surgically removes the evil clinging to us. But if we never expose ourselves to the light because of fear of what we will see, we will never have the benefit of cleansing power of Christ's light. It is hard to face our sins. Many times it is much harder for us to confess those sins to another fellow Christian. But it is the road to health! Confess your sins before God! He is faithful! His light will cleanse you from all unrighteousness! Then the reflection looking back at you in the mirror will Shine, because of what God has done. Shine, Jesus, Shine! For Your Light gives new Life! Amen. Rudy

Alligators

There's an old saying, modified slightly for this venue, that goes something like, 'When you up to your butt in alligators, it's hard to remember that your original intention was to drain the swamp.' What I have come to realize lately is that sometimes the alligators are of our own creation. And that they aren't always bad, in and of themselves. They can still divert us from our original goals for a time, however. So instead of trying to shoot the alligators, I am trying a new concept of redirection. If we can keep all of our personal alligators swimming with us and helping achieve our personal goals, then we began to see how God can work through the little trials of our lives and build His kingdom through them. Sometimes the redirection is only a nudge and sometimes it requires grabbing the particular alligator by the snout and turning it totally around. When the day before you seems to be all alligator wrestling, it is easy to despair before even suiting up for the challenge. So this old familiar verse has been roiling around in my head all night and I would like to share it for all the alligator wrestlers getting ready to suit up. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 Take the yoke of Jesus with you into this day that is before you and be encouraged by it. Draw strength and wisdom from it. Let Him do battle with you when redirecting alligators seems more than you equipped to handle. Dear Jesus, walk with each of us today and help us carry the load that you have called us to shoulder. Thank you, Lord, for your strength! Rudy

From Within

I have done a fair amount of firewood cutting over the years. The search for just the right tree is always part of the process. You look for something that is dead but not so dead that it has rotted. In scanning the tops of trees, it's pretty easy to find the dead ones. But then, it's really tough finding the ones that haven't been attacked from within by the termites. In fact, it's usually not until one puts the chain saw to the trunk and begins cutting that it becomes apparent that the tree is worthless, because termites have turned the insides into saw dust. There is one thing in the church that I believe acts just like those termites. Gossip. Gossip doesn't act slowly like rot from water. It is very aggressive and eats away at the inside of a person or a church just like termites attack a tree. There are many times that we don't see the devastating effects of gossip, because it eats away at the inside. The wisest man that ever lived tells us that "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts." Since I can't talk to that man, I'm not sure what he meant. But I think we would all agree that he is indicating that gossip can get inside of us. And I think it just sits there and rots us from the inside out. A rule that I have adopted lately seems to be helping me in this area. I have decided that I will not say anything about a person when they are not around that I wouldn't be perfectly comfortable having them listen to if they were standing right beside me. And, of course, in any situation we can decide to put the best construction on things or put a bad light on things. So, as my Mom used to say, 'If you can't say anything good, don't say anything at all!' May the Lord guide your lips and your hearts today! Rudy

Too Busy

I was told yesterday by a dear friend that even if they did have a problem they wouldn't talk to me about it because I was too busy. They felt that I would be "burdened." So I ask you. How do we function in this world and still remain approachable to our friends when they need us? I know that all the things I'm busy with are fleeting. They are here and then they are gone, no big deal. But, the relationships that I should be building through caring and understanding are the things that endure. Even though I like to think I am a caring individual, I admitted to this friend, as we were talking yesterday, that on all my "spiritual gifts inventories" that I have ever taken I am lowest in Mercy. Sometimes it's just easier to get involved in things than lives. For me at least, I think the beginning of the solution is to try to understand the love that Jesus had when he gave up His life for us. As we look into a friend's eyes, we know that Jesus loved that person so much, He died for them; just so that person could be reunited with Him in heaven. If Jesus had the time to die for them, surely I have the time to share a cup of tea with them. Someday time will be gone. Until then we are called to invest it wisely. "What does the worker gain from his toil? ... I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and to do good while they live." Ecclesiastes 3:9,12 I pray, Lord, that as I go through this life that I will not be unapproachable because of my busy-ness. Please grant me the gift of mercy to be able to share with others. Please open my eyes to the need. Thank You, Lord. Amen. May you use your time wisely today! Rudy

The promise

Just like there are days in March in Colorado that are really crummy, there are also days that have the promise of spring. I look forward to spring every year with wonderful anticipation. It is a most exciting time of year. What was once dry, frozen and brown becomes magically transformed to a vibrant green. The days become warmer and the sunshine warms the earth so that it can again bring forth food. And for us that live in the mountains, the days become noticeably longer. Overall, it is just a time of year that I really look forward to. One other reason I like it so much is that it reminds me of what happens to a life when Jesus Christ enters in and makes that heart His home. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17 I love to see in a person when the old dryness of a dead existence give way to the fresh green of new growth. I love to see in a person when he or she starts questioning the amount of Sonshine that they had in their life and strives for more. I love to see the warmth that springs from a heart and soul that has been renewed by the love of Christ. And the fruit that can spring forth from that life. I love to see the vibrancy that comes into a person when they become the new creation that Christ wants them to be. In case you can't tell, I just love it when Christ gets a hold of a person! Glory be to Jesus for both the springtime of the earth and the rebirth of our spirits! May the warmth of God's springtime bring renewed growth in your lives as you become His new creation! Rudy

The Patient Artist

I've been talking lately about what happens in one's life when God gets a hold of us. Yesterday, I was presented with a great example. For several months, a friend of mine has been struggling with all kinds of work related issues. And we have been praying with and for him. Yesterday, he informed me that his prayer has change to asking God to put him wherever God can use him the best. His prayer has change from one where he was telling God what to do to one where he is giving control of his job and his life over to God. His prayer has changed from one of selfishness to one of submission to God's will. It is a wonderful transformation. But it is a change that only God could have brought about. No amount of coaching or prompting from his friends, even if we would have thought about it, would have accomplished the change. Isaiah prophesies about Jesus and tells us, "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." 42:3 God takes each one of us where we are, bruised and broken, barely burning at all, and he gently molds and transforms us to be instruments for His work on earth. It is a slow process. One that may at times not even be evident to us. But rest assured, He is a patient artist that knows the breaking point of each one of us. He will gently smooth and work us just like a potter works with clay, until we can serve Him and our fellow man. Then as any perfect artist does, He will continue to mold and shape us. The process will not be finished until He takes us home to be with Him. So strive today to yield to the Master's hand. May the Will of our Father in Heaven be our greatest desire! Rudy

The Attack

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 6:12 Think of the most experienced general of any war, and then give him all the battle experience of ages of wars and conflicts and skirmishes. That is at least the level of experience that Satan has in his quest to lure us away from the TRUTH of the Gospel. We can no more anticipate his attacks or strategies than a newborn could wage battle in the Gulf. But, I am almost sure that the attacks are never head-on and recognizable. If they were, we could be ready for them. I think they are much more subtle. Usually coming at a time when we are least ready to deal with them and from a direction that we don't expect. I bet that many times they aren't even about anything important. But, if Satan can get us arguing about little non-consequential things, then he can get us directed away from the ministry that God wants us to be involved in. It might be the color of the carpet in the nursery. Or the latest gossip about someone who used to be a dear friend. Or the internalization of pain that we should be sharing with a Christian friend. So from my very limited viewpoint, we need to watch out for little side battles that Satan wants to draw us into. We need to stay focused on the end goal of winning the hearts and the minds of unbelievers for the Kingdom of God. If it doesn't involve the salvation of a person, maybe we shouldn't even show up for Satan's little game. So the word for today seems to be focus. Focus on things that have eternal significance. Let the other stuff go. May the One who won the ultimate battle for us, be your general in battle today! Rudy

A Fad?

I think that there must be a personality type-a type of person-that goes from fad to fad. Maybe there's a little of that type in each one of us. For instance, I am kind of a tech junkie. The best advertisement to get me to buy something is to tout it's leading edge technology. So maybe I buy into fads? Well, anyway I have seen people that treat Jesus like He was the latest fad. They get saved, then they are hot for church, hot for mission work, give a whole bunch of money and then fissile. Maybe each of us kind of treat Jesus like a fad sometimes. We get excited about the latest mission project and then get all distracted about something else. Somehow we need to stress to all the fad people and maybe to ourselves that Jesus is different from that latest electronic gizmo to hit the market. Jesus really is the real thing! "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" 1 Timothy 2:5 The old saying that "the one who dies with the most toys still dies" is true. But the one who dies with Jesus has Eternal Life. That's a big difference. We have to make sure we don't relegate Jesus to a fad in our own lives. Jesus needs to be the underlying foundation on which we build our entire lives. He has to be the filter through which we sift every decision. He has to be the motivation for every act of kindness. He has to be the glue that holds our lives together. Praise God for sending His only Son to be our mediator with Him! May Jesus be the real thing in your life! Rudy

Paul Says: "There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 11:7-10 This is definitely one of those concepts that one cannot understand using human logic. 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.'?? What kind of logic is that? Certainly not one that this world understands. None of us like to be weak. And when we are weak, we certainly don't like to admit it! But yet Paul is saying we should boast about it, because it glorifies Christ. Well, let me boast right now about my weakness in understanding this concept. I don't even know what to write. So I will let us all ponder this concept over the weekend. Maybe if any of you have examples that would help us understand this 'deep truth' you might consider sharing it with me so I can pass it along. Have a blessed weekend. May the Love and Wisdom of Christ be yours today and always. Rudy

God's Direction

Jesus said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 I used to think that I would pray about a situation, then if there was no negative response from God; closing doors, etc., I would just plow forward, assuming God would stop me if it wasn't His will. And I am not sure that I am much beyond that point. However, I think a better action strategy, is to pray about the situation and then be patient, and let God work. That is really hard for me! Yes, I want to give it all to God, and then I want to take it all back again and do it myself. Now, I am positive that God doesn't want us just sitting around like lumps of clay, doing nothing. But I think it is more an issue of who's in charge; who is conducting this grand experience called life. Maybe the Body of Christ can be viewed as a great symphony orchestra, with God as the conductor. When we watch for our direction and timing from God the whole tapestry of life comes together as it should. But without that direction, we may be playing the right part but our timing is way off. When we rely on our own strength to get things done, it maybe like we are playing Bach when we were supposed to play Brandenburg. I played the cello in Jr. High School, and believe me when I say that I know what it sounds like to not follow the conductor. But I have also been blessed to be part of some great music. And when it comes together, I think we get just a little glimpse of what it's like to sing in the heavenly choir. And when we allow God to lead in our lives, things click. You know things are happening the way they are suppose to. So, if you're relying on your own strength, maybe it's time to reevaluate. But, no one can play your instrument for you. God's symphony of life needs you! But the timing is all between you and the Conductor! May the Lord of all guide you in your walk with Him today! Rudy

Accountability VS Judging

There seems to be a whole ton of confusion over when it is appropriate to hold one's Christian brother or sister accountable. I have been involved in a number of accountability relationships. One of the most important ingredients is a mutual agreement to hold each other accountable. Without that agreement it doesn't work. When I enter into that relationship I agree to submit to that person's review of my life and actions. I believe that submission has to be voluntary. I have found that these accountability relationships are very good for me and I would suggest that all of you try it. Judging, I believe, is a whole different animal. Jesus says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Matthew 7:1-2 So what is the difference? One of the main differences is motivation. An accountability relationship is motivated out of love for the other person. A real sense of caring about the person's well being. Judging, on the other hand, is motivated out of a need to control the other person. A need to prove the person wrong. A need for other people to see that the other person is wrong and you were right. All bad reasons. Walk along side a person and offer an arm of assistance, a word of encouragement not a word of judgment. In this case, as with many things, the motivation is your heart makes all the difference in the world! May the Holy Spirit show you where your encouragement is needed! Rudy

It's time for Grace

My dear wife, Dena, went to her Ladies Bible study yesterday and was confronted by an alarming statistic. In reading it, I decided that I needed to do my little part in reversing the trend. Here's the stat: "In a 1994 study, 45 percent of LCMS women said they believe they can earn salvation by their deeds, and a 1999 study by the Barna Research Group showed that most Americans do not believe in salvation by grace alone." I guess that this shouldn't surprise me, because since the fall, man has wanted to take credit for what God has done. But for all you out there in e-mail land, I want the record to state clearly: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Romans 3:28 Because, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Rom 3:23 One more time, for clarity sake, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9 Yes it is true, that "faith without deeds is dead," James 2:26, but those deeds are a natural response of a living faith. They are not our salvation! Just as fire cannot help but produce heat, a living faith cannot help but have good works. But dear friends, Jesus tells us directly, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." John 6:44 Our salvation is wholly and completely dependent on God and His mercy. Nothing we have ever done or will do will merit or pay for our trip to heaven. Even our own "decision" to follow Jesus was a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank You Jesus! for our one way trip to heaven. May the God of all Grace and Mercy be with you now and forevermore! Rudy

Is it time to listen?

I'll bet every one of us knows one. A person who, having heard about half a sentence on a subject, has started to give advice about how to fix all your problems. I must admit, there's a lot of "fixer" in me. For some reason over the past week or so, I have been called upon to listen -- and not fix. For all us "fixers" out there, an important thing to learn is that listening maybe all the fixing some problems need. Last night, I was sitting in our church's "dining hall" listening to three girls and all their problems. For a certain part of me, this does just not come natural. But there's another part of me, I guess the fatherly role, that really wanted to be there and offer whatever help I could. The only measure of success I had, is that after the evening was over, a dear friend who had been nearby at another table, told me that I had listened well. But there sure was a part of me that wanted to yell out a "fix." James tells us in 1:19, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak..." I guess my Mommy had read this, because she told me I had two ears and only one mouth, so I should listen twice as much as I talked. Maybe God will call upon you to listen today. Before you offer a "fix," consider carefully if maybe listening was the only fix your friend needed. May the Lord grant you wisdom to know when your words are needed. Rudy

It's within You

No, I am not crossing over to new age thinking. There is much that is within you, especially the reborn spirit that has new life because of your faith in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Both Matt and Eddie, two of my college students, are struggling with witnessing to unbelievers. We talked in class yesterday about how you may be the only view of Christ and unbeliever gets. The "evangelism" that goes on on the front lines is the most important kingdom work there is. And God has called each one of us into relationships with nonbelievers to be able to share the Good News. So, as we talked in class yesterday, everyone was beating themselves up because of their lack of Bible knowledge. And yes, I agree that we should strive to learn what we believe and where it is in the Bible. BUT, our lack of Bible knowledge is no excuse to not witness to the hope that is within us. 1 Peter 3:15 does tell us to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." And that does lay a burden of "being prepared" on us. However, we are also told, when we are called to answer charges on what we believe, to "not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." Mark 13:11 So when asked to give an account for the hope that is within you, speak from your heart. Sure, the Bible verses help, but your passion and fire that is within you is what is contagious. That's what will turn an unbelieving heart around. So don't shy away from those situations where you might have to give account, it is for those times that you have been called! May the Holy Spirit guide your words so that all might hear the wonderful news! Rudy

Christo-Centric

So the question is, is your life more centered on yourself, other people or God? Are you egocentric or Christo-centric? There is no doubt that this is a constant struggle for all of us. Even when we think to say "To God be the Glory" it many times comes off sounding hollow and trite. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31 But how do we do that? How do we pull it off without looking even more egocentric than if we would have just kept our mouths shut in the first place? As with many things, I believe it relates to our true motives. Only God can judge our hearts. But if we can truly confess with Paul, "For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved." (1 Cor 10:33), then we can begin to make the transition from egocentric to Christo-centric. I think it comes down to an issue of trust. Do we really trust Jesus to look out for us? After all, He gave up his life so that each one of us could live. As we walk this journey of life, God calls us to cast all our cares on Him. He calls us to trust Him for our daily bread. He calls us to lean not on our own understanding, but to trust His wisdom and insight. If all Christians were truly more interested in the welfare of our brothers, both saved and unsaved, and willing to let God take care of us, wouldn't this world be such a wonderful place to live? We could actually share our inmost hurts with a brother and not worry about the gossip that might come back to bite us. So, how about this life strategy? God first, our fellow man second and let God take care of us. I like it! Try it and let me know what you think. May the blessing of Our Lord, who loves you more than life itself, rest on you today! Rudy

Friendship

When I was in Junior High School, back in the dark ages, I had a girl friend. Back then, if you didn't have a girlfriend, everyone thought there was something wrong with you. I know such painful and backward thinking hasn't persisted into this enlightened age, right? Well, anyway, one thing I remember about this friendship is how hard it hurt when I got dumped. Then after the fateful dumping day, what bitter enemies we became. It is so sad to think that two people who were once best friends could become bitter enemies. I bet Satan has a party every time that happens. For friendships, relationships or even marriages to last, they have to be built on more than just a physical or common bond type of attraction. "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12b Now, I know this is a stretch, and it probably takes a theology degree or something equivalent to get this message from this verse. But, I think this verse says that if you weave a friendship with three cords: you, your friend and God; that that friendship will not be easily broken. In fact, if you weave God into the relationship, through praying together, maybe a little Bible study or even just talking about what you believe, there is much less chance that one of you will feel like crapping on the other when things get a little rocky. And, any friendship will have rocky times. It is what makes a friendship strong. God can make the difference between whether that friendship endures the rocky times or end up crashed on them. May the Lord bless you and keep you, now and forevermore! Rudy

Some Days

It seems to me, from my post 40 perspective that the world's time clock is speeding up. Time is no longer a constant in my life, it is relative. I remember the summer after my year of being a first grader. It was blessed and wonderful and LONG; impossibly long, like it would never end. Summers now seem to go by in a blink. Recently, I was talking with one of my college students about an event that in my mind was recent news, and come to find out it had happened before they had been born. So, as I was contemplating what to write this morning, I was thinking through the business of life. How the days can just seem to mold into one another, and soon a year is gone without anything to show for it. If we are not careful, a whole lifetime could be gone with nothing to show for it. "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8 What this verse talks about is primarily a way of life. Yes, life is zooming by at warp speed. How do you make a difference? You make a difference in the small things. In the precious moments where caring and relationships happen. If you are all wrapped around the axle about the next deadline, or so worried about the next promotion, or any other number of things, that you can't live in the here and now you will spend your whole life chasing and never spend it living. God desires us to have a rich and full life on this earth. That's one reason He tells us to "take no thought for the morrow." Not because He wants us to be irresponsible, but because He wants us to live today! Not waste today worrying about tomorrow. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of today. May God's everlasting peace allow you to enjoy today! Rudy

Stop the Bus!

Every once in a while I give everybody the opportunity to get off my mailing list. Since I haven't done this in a while, now's probably a good time. If you would really rather not be getting these every day, just drop me a note, or even just the word "delete" and I'll take your name off. For all you college students that will be going somewhere other than your college address this summer, now would also be a good time to give me a summer email address AND the dates that it is effective. It's pretty easy for us to lose track of where everyone is. Especially now with all the college trips to far off places. It is very reassuring to me that the Lord knows right where each one of us is. He doesn't need us to forward a new email address just so we can still be in touch with Him. We have the promise that "The Lord will keep you from all harm -- he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Psalm 121:7-8 So, with that wonderful promise, I leave you for this week. May our Lord, indeed, watch over your coming and going both today and for the rest of eternity! Rudy

Filth Within

In many areas, we Christians are hypocrites. Sometimes just a little, sometimes a whole bunch. There is one area that I think many keep hidden, and it is a source of success for Satan. Picture if you will, a way that Satan could get you thinking about something that you know you shouldn't be dwelling on. Then whenever you get a chance you sneak away and spend time just with him. You hide it so no one else will know or maybe you even share it with certain friends so that you won't feel so guilty. The after a while, you might even argue that it's not even that bad, after all no is getting hurt. All the while getting more and more involved with this little secret--and Satan's just laughing away. What I am talking about is pornography. I not sure about you girls, but I know that many Christian guys struggle with this issue. Many think that is OK to have a little vice on the side -- or have even convinced themselves it's not wrong. Satan is not the only one that knows secrets. God also knows. And I am positive that pornography greves the Holy Spirit in a big way. Every time you open the pages of a filthy book or click on that Internet site or rent the wrong movie, you are inviting Satan right into your inmost parts. Right where he can get a hold of you and start working his lies. "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness." Mat 6:22-23. Your heart is the very dwelling place of the most high God! Do you think He likes sharing His temple with darkness? Don't let Satan pull one over on you. Just like Jesus did, cleanse the temple! May the Lord who lives inside of your heart, bless you and keep you pure, now and forevermore. Rudy

Matthew 18

There is a principal of relationships presented in Matthew 18, that is so simple, yet seems to be so difficult for us to put into practice. If we all could do this with all our problems, our world would be so much nicer. Here's the NIV version. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Matthew 18:15 Now for the slightly expanded Rudy's version: If you think that your brother or sister has done something wrong against you, or if he/she has just been irritating, go to him or her before you share the situation with anyone else, because that's gossip and it will make the whole situation much worse. When you go to show your brother or sister his or her fault, speak the truth in love; try to say things the way you would want someone to tell you if you had done something wrong. Don't go to him or her in anger, because then it's your problem, not theirs. Always pray before you talk to them and ask God to show you your own fault in the situation, because there is always two sides to every story. Be willing to listen; try to understand their point of view. Do this every single time you have an interpersonal relationship issue. Don't go to their boss, or their friends or anyone else before you talk with them. If the person listens to you and you are able to resolve your differences then you have won back your brother or sister and your relationship will be stronger. If you do anything else to resolve the difference you will probably lose the friend. So, do it the right way every time! May God bless your community of relationships. Rudy

What's Your Rudder?

"Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go." James 3:4 All of us are steered through life by rudders. Some we wouldn't want to admit to and others that we would like to show off to the world. As you go through your day, what is it that gets you going, keeps you going and gives you your direction? For many, it is simply "the boss." Most of our day we do what we do simply because if we don't, we will probably lose our jobs. And, of course, we couldn't lose our jobs, because the money we earn is required to pay the bills and provide for our families, right? So many times, at least for us adults, we get backed into using a rudder that we wouldn't choose if we actually put some thought into it. I know it's hard, but Jesus wants to be the rudder that guides us through this life. He wants to be the reason that we provide for our families. He wants to be the very reason we get up in the morning. He wants to be the guiding and directing force in our lives. So, throughout today ask yourselves, at least 15 times, "Why am I doing this?" Try and identify some of the motivators in your life. Then, tonight lay them before the cross of Jesus and ask Him what He thinks of the motivators in your life. Then maybe come up with a few new motivators for life's path. We know that whatever we do, it needs to glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, let Jesus be your rudder and follow wherever he might lead you. May the Almighty and wonderfully loving Lord be with you today. Rudy

Asking or Telling?

Noah, my growing up very fast 5 Year old, has begun a new thing. He will say, "Dad, can I ask you a question?" And of course, I'll say yes. Then he will proceed to tell me something. There's no question involved, and his insight is usually something that he has figured out as a "deep truth" for him and he really just wants to share his insight with me. Now, I know that this is just his level of maturity and that someday he will get his grammar straight. But, of course, it gave me pause to wonder, how often, when we are talking to Our Father, that we are telling Him something instead of asking. There are times that we need to revisit the concept of asking a question and then waiting for the answer. "I am confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Ps 27:14 and "Be still, and know that I am God." Ps 46:10 I am not good at waiting. I fear that I am also much better at telling God what needs to be done instead of asking His direction. I think this whole growth process also has a lot to do with whose strength we rely on. If we are truly trusting on the strength of God to accomplish things and not our own, it will be a lot easier to wait for the Lord's actions, instead of impatiently starting out on our own actions. Could this bog us down into inaction? Maybe from the world's perspective. But, if we continually seek the face of God through prayer, I believe that waiting on the Lord can be very, very dramatic. May God grant you the patience to be mature and wait for His direction! Rudy

Trapped

Yesterday, my dear wife Dena was trapped -- in her own house -- by a friendly little Billy Goat. His name is Jordie and a few days ago the horses got a little out of control and knocked down a wall between their pen and Jordie's. So, I've been letting him roam, nibbling on all the fresh grass, until this weekend when I can fix the wall. The way this Billy Goat says Hello is to kind of rub up against you with his forehead. The only problem for my wife is that his forehead also has these big horns on it. So Jordie is waiting at the door to tell Dena hello, and Dena felt like she couldn't even get to the car just because he was standing there. How many times have we stood paralyzed because of fear? Fear of Satan, fear of ridicule, just fear of looking foolish. I would propose to you that all fear is only in our mind. If we are in God's will, there is nothing that we need fear. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7 We look out our doors into the big world and see all kinds of things that scare us. Right then, all those things need to be given to Jesus. You see we give Him all our garbage and He gives us His burden. And His yoke is easy and His burden is light. His burden is simply to tell others about Him and the gift that He wants to give us. The free gift of eternal life, through faith in Him. So the next time you look out the window of life and see all these scary things that threaten to keep you locked inside; fix your eyes on Jesus. He truly is the author and perfecter of our faith. In Him there is no fear. May the perfect love of Jesus drive out all your fear! Rudy

The Risk of Peace

A few days ago I was fortunate enough to get to do Chapel for our Preschool at church. There theme was "The Coming of the King." Yesterday, we as adults got to remember the great ride of our King into Jerusalem. For the kids, I did two coloring sheets, one of a donkey and the other of a mighty war horse. You see these are the two types of transportation that were available for Jesus to ride on. Jesus chose the one that spoke volumes about His intentions. Of course, it also fulfilled prophecy, "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zech 9:9 and Mat 21:5 What an interesting statement for the Kings of Kings to make. Peace not war. Satan, being the one that kind of screws things up from the get go, got the whole message a little backwards. He thought that the donkey instead of the war horse sent a message of weakness. So he laid his trap for Jesus, all the time playing right into the Father's will. I believe, Satan thought he had won right up to the time Jesus died. It is a very dangerous thing to believe ones own lies. But after Jesus died, He proclaimed His victory in hell, to all the lost souls from Noah's time. By that time, the realization was probably starting to sink in to Satan's thick brain how badly he had messed this one up. Our message of peace should not ever be confused with a message of weakness. Through Jesus coming, His willing death and His glorious resurrection we have gained victory over sin death and the devil. It is our duty to likewise come in peace and to share the great news of the King who entered into our lives to bring peace with God the Father. May the Lord of our Peace rule in your hearts and lives today and forevermore! Rudy

The bad side of cliques

For those of you who have been with me and these devo for a while, you may have assumed that my Noah (5 years old now) was just growing up, judging by the lack of inspiration coming from his actions. And for the most part you'd have been right. But this last Sunday there was an incident. He went ballistic; totally out of control. And, of course, I wasn't there so Dena was forced to handle it all by herself. This could be equated to having to control a raging pit bull in a house of fine china, while everybody watched. So after it was all over and I got involved, I tried to find out what triggered this episode. It seems he had been excluded from a little painting job with a favorite cousin while his sister had been included. Nobody likes being excluded, Noah just happens to react more than most. So I started thinking about this whole thing as it applies to us older people. Cliques are where it happens. First there are intense friendships formed--that's good. But then for some reason, those friends start excluding other people from that circle of friends--that's bad. And it hurts; more than most of us will admit. It hurts bad enough we might choose not to go back to that youth group or class or whatever. We are to strive to be like Jesus, and He excludes no one. He desires all to be saved (1 Ti 2:4), He won't crush one of us whose hurting (Is 42:3), He heals our hurts and carries our sorrows (Is 53:4), and He invites us to come to Him (Mt 11:28). So the next time you have a chance, take the good part of cliques -- the intense friendships -- but leave the bad part. Exclude no one. In fact, be like Jesus and invite them into the warmth of His love. May the Savior who calls you to be part of Him, give you the grace and love to accept others! Rudy

No Dew in the House

Some people start their day with that morning cup of fresh brewed coffee. I guess I'm not a very good Lutheran, because I never learned to drink coffee. I do however, do the Dew. Mountain Dew, that is. And this morning, through my own dumb fault, there is no Mountain Dew in this house. Now this is not quite the stressor it once would have been, but it still puts a kink in my day. Some people handle stress in funny ways. For me, a little boost of caffeine, say from an ice cold Mountain Dew is one of my more enjoyable ways to handle stress. I remember hearing Dr. Dobson once describing the condition that Jesus experienced in the Garden, when He was sweating great drops of blood. Dobson even had a name for the medical condition, but the bottom line was, that this condition was brought on by intense stress. Now I know we all think we've been under stress at times, but just think what it would have been like to feel the weight of the sin of every person that ever lived or would live, pressing in on you. Jesus didn't reach for a Dew. He reached for His Father. And somewhere through that prayer, the human side of Jesus -- the side that felt pain just the way you and I do -- found the strength to accept the cup that was before Him. The cup that would mean salvation for you and me. The cup that would lead Jesus through ridicule and suffering greater than any person before or since has had to endure. "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Matthew 26:42 This is our example, that no matter what might be in front of us, if it is the will of Our Father that we endure it, we should submit to that will. After all, what on earth could even come close to the weight of all the sin of all mankind. Besides, Jesus already did that for us. And we know that the very rest that Jesus won for us is waiting for us on the other side of this 'vale of tears.' So no matter what life throws your way look to Jesus as a source of courage. He will sustain you and me -- always and forever! May the Lord of your life, who endured the cross for us, be your strength today, tomorrow and forever! Rudy

Monday and Thursday?

Did any of you, like me, used to think that the reason this day was special was that it was the only day of the year that was really two days? OK, but the real question is do you really know why it's called Maundy Thursday? Maundy comes from Mandate. Jesus gave us a new mandate on Maundy Thursday. Now for the last question, what was the mandate? "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35 Love is a most powerful thing. There's one place in the Bible that tells us if love is our motivator, we will never do the wrong thing. Perfect love drives out all fear. Our example of love is that Jesus was willing to lay down His life so that we might be saved. Even if we had been willing to pay the price for our sin we would have come up short. Not one of us had enough to pay the price. Because it required Perfect Love. So how can we live a life built on love? If some reporter followed you around without you knowing it, just to get a story, would he recognize that you were a follower of Jesus because of your love? I am afraid I might come up short. But yet, this is to be our trademark, the reason everyone will know that we are His followers, because we love each other. Paul tells us to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:31-32 So all I can say to each of us, myself included, is to try again today to love each other. But possibly today, as we ponder the greatest sacrifice of all time, it will give us a new motivation to REALLY love each other! May the Perfect Love of Jesus be with you now and forever! Rudy

Good?Yes, Good!

It is Good Friday because: The greatest gift that could be given was given to me! He hung on a tree -- just for me. Even if I was the only one in the entire world that required a Savior, Jesus would have died that day on Calvary. You see, this day is Good, because Jesus loved me, yes He loved the whole world, but He loved me more than anyone else ever has or will. He walked the way of sorrow, He endured the Passion because he loved me. It is a very personal day for me. Because of what Jesus did, I now have a path that leads me home to heaven and my Jesus. I now know that I have begun eternal life; an eternal life that is full of sweetness and joy. And you know what, just as much as He loved me, He loves you. You, too, can know without a shadow of a doubt that you can be in heaven with Jesus and me, just because of what Jesus did on this Good day. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:15-17 Yes, as a child I wondered what was so good about this day. As I have gained the knowledge of the Power of the Cross of Christ, I have slowly come to the realization that not only is this Good Friday, for me it is the best day that ever could be. Thank you Jesus, for loving me! May the God of Grace walk with you today. Rudy

Mary!

"Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' (John 20: 15-16) Yesterday's sermon at our church grabbed me. Pastor Michael talked about how Mary couldn't see past the tears. She couldn't see that Jesus was there willing to help her because her grief was getting in the way. How many of us are letting things get in the way of seeing Jesus? Jesus is standing there calling us by name, are we listening? Or are we choking out His voice with the temporary cares of this world. A word that I use often around our house is 'focus.' I tell my kids to focus to get ready for school when they have only 5 minutes left. Sometimes I think we, as adults, have learned the 'focus' lesson too well. We are able to focus on our work or play; this earthly life; to the exclusion of the more important world that we truly belong to: Our Father's world, the kingdom of heaven. "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ... His sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:3-4 Mary was focused on her grief, but still when Jesus called her name, she recognized Him and in an instant her grief turned to joy. That's all we need do, whatever our problems are that are drawing our focus away from Him, just listen for our name. He knows each one of us. He calls us by name and we follow Him. He is Risen! Praise His Holy Name! And listen for Him to call yours. May God give you listening ears and willing hearts! He is Risen, Indeed, Alleluia! Rudy

It's Me

Because of Easter we should live differently, right? You know the whole story about the one who was forgiven much by the king and then turned around and demanded payment from someone who owed him little. (Mat 18:21-35) We each need to see that it is us who have been forgiven much. It's me that needs to live a life of grace towards the others that walk this earth, because of what Jesus did for me on Good Friday and proclaimed for all the world to see on Easter Sunday. Because of that Grace shown to me, I need to be the one that lives differently. We no longer can react the way the world does. We no longer have the right to get angry when someone sins against us. Because of what Jesus did for us we only have the Grace response available. There is no other response that is pleasing to God."Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Mat 18:32-35 I'll tell you something, I don't want the price that Jesus paid for me to come back on me. It is by Grace that I have been saved and I must live Grace to my brother. It is the only response that is allowed! May The God of all Grace teach us how to respond with His perfect Grace! Rudy

How do we Listen to God?

I been discussing this topic for twenty years, at least, but for some reason, now it seems to be "in" or something. So I thought I would give some of my ideas for your consideration. The first thing that I feel is very important when one wants to listen to the Almighty Creator of the Universe is to get to know Him. We really have two main ways to do this. Read the Word that He gave us and talk to Him. So the first step is to pray a lot and read the Bible. Simple, right? Then do it! Then if we want to hear from God I think we need to ask Him a question. Ask Him like you expect an answer, not just like you already know what you're going to do and just wanted to check in. Practice asking Him everything. Then maybe when the biggies come up you'll know how to listen for an answer. That brings us to listening. Most of the time in my experience, God talks in the "still small voice" or the "gentle whisper" shown to us in 1 Kings 19:12. But, at least once time in my life it was more like a freight train than a whisper. Anyway, we have to be listening and expecting an answer. And I hate to say it, but I think your lifestyle matters, too. Remember, we are saved by faith, not our works. But, after salvation God expects a new life. That's what He's talking about in Romans 12:2. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will." That's not only a formula, but it's also a promise. So to summarize: 1. Read the Book, 2. Pray, 3. Ask, 4. Listen, 5. Don't Conform, Be Transformed! Try it for a while and let me know what happens. May the Lord of your Life, communicate with you in a very personal way! Rudy

Unaware

Last night in Youth Group we talked about a lot of things. It was surprising to me that many were surprised by that fact that angels can look like people. The Biblical reference is in Hebrews 13:2 where it says: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." So that little verse gave some people new insight into angels. But the bigger discussion topic was truth. You see, I have chosen to believe, through the help of the Holy Spirit, that the Bible is Truth. And the insight that is given to me through the Bible is the truth that I should build my life on. And yes, other people may choose to use something other than the Bible to form their view of truth. And I was called on the carpet for not being accepting of those other view points. However, my view of truth and other people's view of truth doesn't change what Truth really is. My point is this, there is Absolute Truth and what I think it is doesn't change what it really is. I have chosen to believe that when Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) that He was telling me Absolute Truth. Am I willing to accept someone's else's right to disagree with me. Yes! Am I willing to say that their truth is as valid as my Truth. Sorry, No. But the reason I am not willing to put their truth on the same level as the Truth that Jesus spoke is because of love. I know that the only Name under Heaven by which man can be saved is Jesus. And I love my fellow man enough to want to tell them that Truth. May our Lord who Truly died for our sins and Rose again, be with you now and forevermore! Rudy

Build Family

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42

There's a Godly reason for fellowship and BBQs and games of touch football or pickup softball. There's a time to spend quality time with your family. We need to come together, yes for church, but also just for fun times and fellowship. Meals together and times when we can get to know each other better. So, yes, in case you were wondering this is another commercial. Tomorrow, at my house, 9620 Chipita Park Road, we are going to have a FARM Family Fun Day. We will shear a sheep, a goat and a dog. We will chase the guinea. We will learn how to care for horses. Have a great big BBQ. And every single one of you and your families and your friends are invited. Now, I am aware that for some of you the airfare may not be justifiable. But a lot of you just need to get in your car and drive into the mountains. Everything will start around 10 am. and the BBQ will be mid afternoon. If you want more info you may call me at 719-460-0404. So if you're trying to decide if you should go just think "free food!" I hope to see you tomorrow for our Acts 2:42 day. May the Lord bless you and keep you now and forevermore! Rudy

A Way of Life

We all had a great time shearing sheep and riding horses last Saturday. Some people were surprised about how differently the sheep and the goat acted. The goat was very independent, even one time almost getting himself killed by getting his horns caught in some large pallets and then knocking them over. Without our quick rescue attempt, we might of had to butcher him instead of shear him. The sheep on the other hand was very dependent on the goat, following him wherever he went. I think that most of us have lost what was evident to the audience that Jesus spoke to. That is a basic knowledge of sheep and goats. In Matthew 25, where Jesus talks about separating the sheep from the goats, one of the things that has always struck me as odd is that neither the people on his right (the sheep) or the people on His left (the goats) knew when they had done or not done the things Jesus was talking about. "Then the righteous shall answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'" Mat 25:37 Jesus tells them that whenever they did it to the "least of these brothers of mine" that it was the same as doing it to Him. The bad guys who were accused of not doing it, had the same answer. They didn't know when they had screwed up. The point is, it was a way of life for them. It was an attitude that they lived with. As different as the basic attitude of a sheep and a goat. When Jesus lives in our heart, we are a new creation. The old selfish nature is put to death and risen in it's place is the very nature of Jesus. Through Him we can feed the hungry and give a drink to the "least of one of these." It can become the very way we live. A new life where selfish thoughts don't dominate our existence, but the very acts of kindness that Jesus tells us to do are just second nature to us. Each day we need to put to death the sinful goat inside ourselves and invite Jesus to rule over our day. May the Ruler of your day, guide and direct you in the path He has chosen for you! Rudy

The Body of Christ

"If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." 1 Cor 17-18 I spent years trying to do it alone. I thought that the only one in the world that would make the right decision was me. I thought the only person who could do the job fast enough was me. (Normally speed was more important to me than quality.) I am beginning, just beginning, to get a glimpse to see what it is like to work within the Body of Christ. To really rely on a Christian brother or sister. It is wonderful! I cannot explain how much peace it has given me to be able to truly trust my Christian brothers and sisters to work together to accomplish God's work. For me it has meant having to accept a slower pace on some things than I would normally have expected. But waiting on the Lord to act, and then seeing it come together in His timing has truly been a blessing to me. So much so, I am kind of excited when something gets delayed, because I can sit back and watch God work things out for the good of the whole deal. God is the master scheduler. And He has given us every person and resource which we need to accomplish His will in our lives and the lives of the people around us. When we try to do it all ourselves, it's like telling God He doesn't know how to run things. Now I know most of you haven't ever done that, but I know I have. For me, a whole new door of insight has opened into how God works. And it is just wonderful to see all the helping hands He has scheduled for the work that needs to get done. Thank you, Lord, for sending willing workers into this world! Please bless each one of them! Rudy

Bad Teeth

My dog has bad teeth. I love him anyway. Back in the days when I watched TV, there was this show called Cheers. For you youngsters who might not remember it, it was a show about a bar and it's regular set of customers. It's byline was something about a "place where everyone knows your name." And, of course, we all want to be part of something, where other people know us, know our name, and more importantly, care about us. We want them to care about us in spite of the way we look or how smart we are or how much money we have. We want to be accepted. We need to be accepted. From a Christian viewpoint none of those worldly things should matter. We know that we are all sinners and each one of us need the grace of God. And if God loves us enough to send His Son to die for us, that should be enough for the rest of us to love each other unconditionally. But it's not, is it? We are still sinful people and fall into the worldly trap of judging others based on their face or their fortune or even their figure. I think we need an attitude check. Each person, whether saved or unsaved, is precious to God. "For God so loved the world." Now that we have benefited from that love, shouldn't we be sharing it with others? Shouldn't we care enough to find out another person's name? "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Is 52:7 and Rom 10:15 We have a responsibility to love each and every person because of the love that Jesus has given with us. Let's not conform to the way the world looks at people but rather be transformed by the love of Jesus to look at people through His eyes! May the Lord of Love bless you and keep you firmly in His grasp! Rudy

Man's Spiritual Side

In our high school Youth Group last night the topic began with creation, but very quickly shifted to the difference between mankind and animals. Since there was so much "discussion" on the topic, I thought I would look closely at a few Bible verses that talk about the issues. For those who want to get to the question of "Do all dogs really go to heaven?", you'll have to be patient. I won't get there for a couple of days. First let's look at how we came to be. "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Gen 2:7 Why do you think we are told this? It seems, at least from what we are told, that the rest of creation was formed by the Word of God. He spoke and it was created. For mankind, there seems to be an additional step. The very breath of God was breathed into us to give us life. Now on to the new testament. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Rom 8:16 This verse simply shows us that we have a spirit, that it is different from God's Spirit and that there is some kind of communication between God's Spirit and our spirit. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Heb 4:12 Once again, we see that we have a spirit, and that the Word of God can separate our spirit from our soul or *psuche*, which is the Greek from which we get our word psyche; or personality. Spirit on the other hand here means "the breath of God breathed by God into man and again returning to God, the spiritual entity in man." (1) Just one more verse: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thess 5:23 So my point today is just this. We are made in God's image, a three part creation, Body, Mind and Spirit. Tomorrow, I'll talk about animals and how we are different from them AND WHY IT MATTERS! May the God who made you, keep you and guide you. Rudy(1) The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary by Zodhiates

On to Animals (Part 2 in a series)

Part of the effects of humanism and the evolution thing is that we tend, based on those concepts, to either elevate animals to the level of people or we say people are no better than animals. When I tried to say that animals are different from people in Wednesday night's class, I struck an interest in quite a few people. I really believe that this is the result of decades of humanistic teaching in our schools. And many of you are no doubt going to challenge me on my statements over the next several days, and that's OK. As long as our frame of reference is the Bible and we are discussing the truths held in the Bible, I welcome all discussion. If you are not willing to use the Bible as our common frame of reference, then we have to have a different discussion. Because until you accept the Bible as Truth it is very difficult to agree on anything. So, anyway, after that long intro, what are some of the nifty things that animals do? They praise God! "Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures...wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds." Ps 148:7,10 If God wants them to, they can talk: "Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, 'What Have I done to make you beat me these three times?'" Numbers 22:28 They have a soul. "And a third of the living creatures in the sea died." Revelation 8:9 The Greek for living in this passage is the same word I talked about and defined yesterday, *psuche*. Most of the time in the New testament it is translated "soul." This is our personality. It is also something we have in common with animals. On Monday, I'll talk about what animals don't have--a spirit. Until then. May the Lord bless you and keep you safe and warm. Rudy

Why it Matters (Part 3 in a series)

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Col 3:9 OK, guys, those who would say that there is no difference between us and animals are saying it primarily to get away from this concept. This concept that is presented in the Colossians verse basically says that we are accountable for our actions. Because we have been created in God's image we have a spiritual dimension. And when we are "born-again" that spiritual side becomes alive. We then have a "new self" that is aware of sin and no longer needs to be a slave to it. The other side of the argument simply says we can't help ourselves. That we can't not sin. So, their argument goes, since we can't help ourselves let's rejoice in our diversity. The Truth is that we can have self control through the help that comes from our Creator. We no longer need to be a slave to sin, but rather a slave to righteousness. Animals do not have this accountability. We do not expect them to live a moral life. Yes, they can be conditioned to do amazing things. But it is a conditioned response, not a moral responsibility. Will our favorite pet be with us in heaven???? I don't know. And I don't think the Bible tells us. If I had to guess, I would say that yes they will be there, but that is neither based on doctrine or intellect. It is simple based on my desire. The fact is we are saved by Grace and through that belief in our Wonderful Redeemer we will be in heaven, with God and all our brothers and sisters in Christ. That's all we know for sure. But guess what, it's enough! May the Lord who redeemed you from the Pit, keep you safe now and forevermore! Rudy

The Mistake

I am not sure how many of you are familiar with the "Challenge Course" offered at Lutheran Valley Retreat, but for those who are not let me fill you in just a little. The challenge course consists of various obstacles that a group of people must successfully negotiate together. For instance, one of the easiest is a log on the ground. For us last Saturday, we had seven people on one end and eight on the other that simply had to change places -- without touching the ground in any way. I was the second or third person to work down the line of the other group by them squatting down on the log while I stepped over them, all the time being supported by my team mates. By about the last person, I started getting a little cocky, thinking I was getting pretty good at this game. So instead of stepping cautiously over the last person, I sort of jumped -- and lost my balance and made the whole process start over from the beginning. So the question is, what do you do when you screw up? In this case, I said I was sorry to the rest of my team and tried very hard not to do it again. But how often in life do we let a little mistake take the wind out of our sails? We say that we just won't try that again, just to avoid the embarrassment of screwing up again. I think that attitude is exactly what Satan wants to hear. If he can stymie us into inaction because of our fear of failure, then he doesn't have to worry about us doing anything great for God. Because very seldom do we get it right the first time, and if one mistake will stop us, we're worthless. God tells us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8-9 May the God who gave His life to pay for our sins give you the strength to keep trying! Rudy

"The Boat"

In our little college Bible study that has been meeting throughout the summer we talked about a lot of things. But everyone knows what we mean when we talk about "the boat" because we have talked about it so much. I have decided that I don't agree with the boat theory. Simply put the boat theory is if you are on the boat of salvation and living a Godly life, you can do anything on that boat that you wish. Whatever you do is God pleasing and God really doesn't care much about what it is. You just can't jump out of the boat. There are several verses that I feel indicate that this is not the appropriate interpretation of Scripture. The main one is in James: JAS 4:13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." [14] Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. [15] Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. [17] Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. This verse at the very least says that some things are in the Lord's will and some things are not. I certainly agree with the stance that God can take any situation and turn it for good in the Christian's life. But I feel that the above verse says that there is a preferred way. Yes, any way can be used by God, but there is a preferred route through life. Another verse that indicates that there are specific things that God wants us to do is Eph 2:10. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. God has stuff prepared in advance for us to do. And, yes, I believe we are free in Christ not to do those things. But it would certainly seem that if God has prepared things for us to do that he would like us to do them! Likewise, if we choose not to do them, he could still make good come from our alternative actions, but we would not have followed His will. Several other verses that I feel support my position are: PR 16:3 Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. PR 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. PR 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails. JER 29:[11] For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [12] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. As I have contemplated this point I have also pondered the magnificence of God. There is no doubt that God is a God that cares about the details. Simply viewing His creation tells us that He is a master of details. But the Word also tells us the same thing. MT 10: [29] Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. [30] And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. [31] So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. A sparrow will not fall to the ground "apart from the will of your Father." Yes, I would say that God is a God of details. I think He even cares about the details of our life. But, after salvation He has given us the freedom to disagree with Him. He says that both in the Revelation verse that says he stands at the door knocking and where Paul says to us that everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial. A God of details is certainly interested in which course of action I take, at least it would seem so from my perspective. Just a few thoughts to get the brain churning; and maybe a few responses. May the Lord bless you day mightily! Rudy

Conformation of the Body

Most devos won't be a long as yesterday's and today's are. I just wanted to get a point across. Today I want to talk about the Holy Spirit's guidance in our life. Some people state (whether they believe it or not, I don't know) that we can't do anything without the conformation of the body. In other words, the rest of the Christian community has to agree with our own personal course of action. The other extreme are those that say we must only listen to the Holy Spirit. I personally think the truth is somewhere in the middle. We have several references that tell us how to test and approve what God's will is. I'll start with Romans. RO 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. [2] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. I believe that our mind is only transformed by the Spirit. It is God's Spirit that communicates with our spirit. Without that Spirit we are truly dead creatures, able only to sin and can do nothing that pleases God. EPH 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. [17] Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. [18] Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. [19] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And once we have been filled with the Spirit what does the Holy Spirit do for us? PS 143:10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. RO 8:5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. [6] The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; RO 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. [27] And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 1CO 2:10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. [11] For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. [12] We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. [13] This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. [14] The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. [15] The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 1CO 2:16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. 1CO 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. [8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, Of course, I understand there has been great injustices done in the name of following the Holy Spirit. I believe that every thing must conform to the Word. For instance, if the Spirit told me to sacrifice my son the way God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, I would not be able to follow that's spirit's guidance, because it is in conflict with the written Word. So the Word is the rule. If you think the Holy Spirit is telling you to do a sinful thing, you are not listening to the right spirit. Likewise, I believe that there are times when a certain few fellow Christians should be used to help guide us. But, I also believe that there may be times when you have to follow the

Word and the Spirit and you may be alone in that walk. I'll return tomorrow to my usual short format. So stay tuned. And thank you for all the responses on "the boat." Blessings on your day! Rudy

The Class of Life

Jason, my son in college, actually started classes yesterday. The rest of my kids start in the Public school system today. Even little Noah, who has been the subject of so many of my past devotions, starts Kindergarten today. I can't help but think that each of us need to ask God for instructions for His new school year. The "dark ages" concept of education was that all learning was rooted in the Scripture; that all knowledge flowed out from God. Now, even on Christian college campuses, evolution is taught right along side Theology. It seems our enlightened society has brought with it all kinds of ideologies that compete right along side the Truth. How can we ever decipher what really is Truth and what Satan has thrown in to try and deceive us? Adam and Eve started out with just one choice; Don't eat the fruit or do eat the fruit. We have so many choices that they seem to swarm around us like hungry attack bees. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10 As each of us begin this day of new classes, whether it is Kindergarten, college or the school of hard knocks, we should remember where our knowledge is to be rooted. Without God as the basis for our knowledge, it is as worthless as all the meaningless crap the world has for us. But with God as the basis for our wisdom it becomes the key that will allow us to see the divine in the mundane. It will allow us to see beauty in the ugliness of this world. And it will allow us to see the eternal significance in our daily lives. Study hard. Try to find the kernel of Truth in the mass of material that will be thrown at you. And Praise God for beauty and wisdom. May each of you use His Light to see the world today! Rudy

Under the overhang

Recently, I was able to 'hike the peak.' Now for all of you who may not be from around here, when a local says he hiked the peak, it means he took the Barr trail route up Pikes Peak. It is about a 13 mile walk where one gains over 8,000 feet in elevation to end up on top of Colorado's most famous fourteener. The last three miles are above timberline in a very harsh environment. Just on my walk, in that three miles it went from a sunny 53 degrees to a hail storm and 31 degrees in less than an hour. But as I was trudging along under my raincoat looking down at the hail bouncing off of me and all the ground around me, I saw a wondrous sight. A little clump of bright green foliage with bright yellow flowers blooming out of the center. I wondered at how the plant was growing so well in such a harsh environment. I realized it's secret was its location. It had nestled under this massive boulder, which actually leaned out over the delicate little flower. The flower had plenty of access to sunshine but at the same time had the rock of Gibraltar as its own personal protector. How often do we start out in our wonderful nestled little spot under the Rock of Ages only to choose to step out into the hail storm of life without any protection. Jesus talks about how his own people were not willing to accept Him. "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Luke 13:34 Oh Lord, let me be willing to live in your shelter! Let me proclaim to the world that Your shelter is available to all who seek safety. And thank you, Lord, for calling me under your wing. May the Rock of All Ages, protect you as you bloom to Glorify Him, today! Rudy

Dirty Dishes

Picture if you will, a favorite plate. This plate is the one you get to eat your supper on every night. And when you are done with supper it goes over to the sink and gets clean for it's next use. Now, just for a moment, imagine that one night you didn't take it over to the sink for it's regular cleaning after you had eaten. Now the next night you come back to supper and that plate is still sitting there only it's not clean. It hasn't been washed. Of course, you are a little disgusted by it, but you have to eat, so you just put tonight's food over the top of the last night's remains and eat your supper. As this continues, your favorite plate, which you used to be proud of, turns into a filthy, stinking thing that you wouldn't show to anyone. Of course, none of us would do such a thing. Even if Mommy wasn't there, eventually we would wash our own plate, just so we wouldn't eat in filth. So why then, I ask you, do we sometimes leave our lives tarnished by unrepented sin? Jesus is standing there willing to wash our life clean from the sin that builds up each day, why not let Him? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9 We daily, sometimes each minute, need that cleansing that only Jesus can give. Otherwise, our lives become a filthy thing that we are ashamed to show in public. But once clean, our lives become a testimony to the Grace by which we have been cleansed. Why not consistently take our dirty dishes to Jesus? Then rejoice in the meal that he has prepared for us! May the LORD be merciful to me and you! Rudy

Semi Formal

Isaiah tells us that "all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (64:6) There are days, yesterday just happened to be one of them, that it becomes painfully obvious that my best just isn't good enough. What, of course, is worse is when it becomes as obvious to everyone else that my best isn't good enough. It really doesn't matter how good we are, sooner or later, we are all going to come up short. I am thankful that I have at least realized it. Jesus talks about someone who hadn't caught on yet in Matthew 22:11 and following. It is the story of the great banquet, when all from the street corners were invited into share it's greatness. One guy didn't catch on that his filthy rags weren't good enough dress for the banquet. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless." It goes on to tell us that the man was tied up and tossed out into the darkness. He hadn't understood that his rags were just not good enough and that the wedding clothes the steward of the banquet was freely handing out were not only better than his rags, but they were required dress. I think God allows days like I had yesterday to remind us that our rags just aren't good enough. And that he freely gives us His white robe, won for us by His precious blood. It is the only dress that is allowed at the great wedding feast to come. And, folks, it's absolutely free! Thank You, Jesus! May our blessed Savior remind you of your banquet clothes. Rudy

The Weakest

God chooses to use weak people. He chooses to use ordinary people so that when all is said and done the glory would go to Him instead of to the individual. Now I know that most of you are familiar with this concept. But I wonder if you have applied it to yourselves. Each one of us knows ourselves better than any other person knows us. We know our secret sins; we know the weaknesses that we have; and we know all the reasons that we are just not the right ones for God to choose to accomplish his plans. And you know what, all of those weaknesses just qualify us all the better to serve God in awesome places and situations. The Old Testament story of Gideon, as well as many others, illustrates this concept. First God calls Gideon, and Gideon has a great excuse. "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." (Judges 6:15) So God is calling the weakest of the weak and, of course, in Gideon's mind that lets him off the hook. But God in essence says, "I will be with you and that's good enough." So Gideon tries to do it the world's way and raise a big army to go fight the battle. But God tells Gideon that he has too many men and through two different siftings, sends all but 300 home. This is so that "Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her." (Judges 7:2) So when you think of all the reasons why God wouldn't want you, you must remember that the battle belongs to the Lord. And you and I, by virtue of our weaknesses are eminently qualified to be the general! May the Lord bless your walk and your calling today! Rudy

Humble

"Young men, in the same way be submissive to those that are older. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:5-6 There is no doubt in my mind that the word 'submissive' is a bad word in today's society. Being humble does not come naturally to most people. And submitting to anyone makes most people grind their teeth. Why? I think the world and Satan are so ingrained in us that we just don't even see any benefit to being submissive or humble. We see it as being weak. Frankly, from my perspective it does feel like you are weak. Maybe that's why God gave us a promise that He will lift us up in due time. But, of course, we want control over that timing, also. Once again it is in the Lord's hand. We get to sit and wait, and wait. But that also is part of the submitting. And the poorer we are at submitting, I think the longer the wait might be. For some reason, the Lord has been teaching me a lot about submitting lately. So I am thinking I need to work harder on the humble part. I am going to begin today by once again submitting all my cares to Him and admitting that He can handle them so much better than I can. Then I am going to pray for a humble heart. I would like each one of you to try the same thing and then share with me any wonderful insights that you might gain from the exercise. May the Lord bless you with a humble heart. Rudy

Searching

Now this little analogy may be a stretch, but hang in there and I think you'll understand my point. I live on the edge of my cell phone coverage area. So whenever I drive west to do work I drive out of the coverage area. I have pretty much learned where I can get a call and where I can't. For a long time I would just leave my phone on even though I couldn't get a signal, mainly so I wouldn't forget to turn it back on when I came back into the service area. But when I did that; left the phone on while it was "searching" for a signal; when I came back into the area I would always run low on battery power. It took me the longest time to realize that while the phone is searching for a signal it uses much more energy. So here's the tie. When we are connected to God we can use considerably less energy in the day to day hassles of life than when we are "searching" on our own for answers. We can also be much more productive when we are connected to the Father's will in our daily life. Jesus didn't have a cell phone analogy, He put it this way: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 Those last words, "apart from me you can do nothing," should tell us that it is futile to even try to live without being connected to Jesus. And life is just much harder when you try to do it yourself. So today, as I drive west, I will turn my phone off to save it's battery. Aren't you glad that we never can drive out of Father's coverage area? May you stay in touch today and always! Rudy

Out of Control

I was fortunate enough to borrow a friend's jet ski over the Labor Day weekend and we were able to combine a trip to the craft fair for Dena with a trip to the lake for me. Saturday was just a beautiful day in Colorado so there were a lot of boaters on the lake. Oh, one more relevant piece of info. We have had a very dry summer, so the reservoir levels are really low. The boat ramp into this lake was steep and very long to reach down to where the water was. So as I was circling back to the shore to pick up yet another child for a ride on the jet ski, I happened to be looking directly at the boat ramp where all the boaters were launching their boats. And I see this 25 foot cabin cruiser, without a truck attached, going down this very long, steep boat ramp backwards, all by itself and very fast. By the grace of God nobody was behind it and it went straight down the ramp and into the water. I couldn't help but try to come with an analogy for a devotion. The obvious one is that we are just like that boat on a trailer and God is our truck. As long as we are connected, He can pull us in the right direction. But if for some reason our hitch comes loose, we very quickly become an out of control projectile that not only is very dangerous to ourselves but to others that might be around us. This gives me a chance to use one of my favorite verses. When Paul is talking to the Athenians, he says of our relationship with God, "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) How great is the gift that we have been given! It is absolutely foolishness to try to unhook ourselves from God and go through this life like a boat out of water. May each of you stay connected to the One, True God today! Rudy

There is a difference

First let me start by saying that there is no difference. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-27 So, in regard to salvation, we are all the same; in regard to salvation there is no difference between men and women. BUT, in just about every other way there are many differences between men and women. Why, just yesterday it was pointed out to me that women have twice as many tear glands as a man does. When we accept the world's agenda that there are no differences between men and women, I think we set ourselves up for countless troubles. I for one, am very glad that there are differences; just think how terribly boring this world would be without those differences. Now the trick is not to see those differences as setting either one higher on some worldly totem pole of importance. We have each been made by God to glorify Him and to do the works that He has set before us. And He has suited each one of us uniquely for the job. We need to thank God for our weaknesses, because through them we turn to Him for strength; and we need to thank God for our strengths and realize that each strength is to be used for His glory - not our own. Praise God for differences! May each one of you smile right now because of the strengths God has given you! Rudy

Why?

"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalm 139:16 Why do we have such a hard time swallowing the fact that God knows us better than we know ourselves? Why do we have such a hard time accepting that God loves us more than we could ever even love ourselves? Why does it so gaul us to admit that God has a plan for our lives? Why do men have such a hard time letting someone else drive the car? Why do we never ask for directions? I think it comes down to that one nasty word: Control. We want to have the illusion that we are in control. Even once we realize that it is an illusion, holding onto that illusion is better than saying that God is really in control. So we go through life saying that I am in control of my destiny. We say that we are a product of our choices. I would a whole lot rather serve God with my eyes open than deluding myself. I want to yield control. With the songwriter I want to say: "Mold me and make me, this is what I pray." "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." Jeremiah 18:6 Oh, Lord, how precious are Your hands that mold and make me new each day. As you work on me today, please remove all the stubbornness, and let me serve you willingly! Let me go where you want me and do the works that you have prepared before the foundation of the world for me to do. Help me to submit control to you, dear Lord, with my eyes wide open. Amen and Amen. May the Lord bless you and keep you today and forevermore! Rudy

Community

Yesterday, I met with my college Bible study as we do each Thursday. It is such a wonderful feeling of community, that I wish each one of you could be transported, via Star Trek technology, just to join us for that hour. I draw so much from these youthful minds that sometimes I feel selfish. But on to the subject. What came up was this latest physic who has been making the late night talk show circuit. From what was said about her, she must put on a pretty good show. The thoughts on how we could respond varied from: 'it's OK for recreational fun' to 'don't have anything to do with it.' Of course, I side with the later stance. Take the time to read Ephesians Chapter 5 because I think it is very relevant to all our daily choices, but here I will focus on verse 11-12. "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." I think this is good council and even applies to our 'recreational' life. I really don't think we should even play around with the stuff. That is Satan's way of desensitizing us to the evil that is all around us. Just a little later in verse 15, Paul says, "Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Let each one us measure the worth of our actions, even 'recreational' ones. May the Lord bless you today! Rudy

Hiding Place

Naomi is my youngest daughter at the wonderful age of 3. Last night, as she was having a late night snack of spaghetti Os, she had that terrible problem that 3 year olds sometime have; she spilled. Now it wasn't a big spill, just a little between her bowl and her on the counter, but she has gotten into the habit of telling us the second a spill happens and expecting us to clean it up immediately. Well, before I could get there with a napkin she accidentally moved her bowl over the top of the spill. Her reaction was so cute. It was something to the effect of, "look it went away." But, the enlightening part about it was - she was so happy that she had taken care of it and it didn't need to be cleaned up. I'm curious. Do you remember when you first had the thought to hide your sin from God? I know we have all been through this stage. Just like Naomi has to learn that the spill didn't go away just because she can't see it anymore, we have to learn our sin didn't go away if we hide it from God. David said, "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like day, for darkness is as light to you." Psalm 139:11-12 Each of us have to come to the point where we are no longer trying to hide our spills from God. In fact, we need to regress to the little child hood days of wanting them cleaned up as quickly as possible. We need to call to God for the clean up ASAP! May you be blessed in the living of today! Rudy

Old Foe

Yesterday was one of those days that we all have but none of us enjoy. You might think with the morning that you have everything in control, but it becomes painfully obvious as you move through the day that things are going to stack up against you. By last night I was whopped. That is when Satan, my old adversary, made his move. Over some little non-issue in the nursery at church, he attacked my wife. If the attack had been head on I might have recognized it, but instead I returned to a former self where my anger was instant and it was intense. I really felt that I had dealt with that chapter of my life and had put it behind me. So one point that I would like to make is that we always have to be on the look out for an attack in the areas that we think we have mastered. Anyway, I was saved by my wife of many years who was able to get me out of the church before I said too many things to too many people. Sometimes I just need to return to the Book and read an old familiar promise that grounds me in the love that my Savior has for me. So, just for a moment, relax with me and bask in the glow of this verse. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, presents your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 Yes, every once in while Satan slips in and pokes you, but the battle belongs to the Lord. We are not fighting with our own strength, but with the strength of the Almighty Creator of the Universe. Praise God for His faithfulness! May Christ guard your hearts and minds today! Rudy

Dwelling

Dwelling -- like thinking on it -- not like your house. Paul says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things." Philippians 4:8 How often do we find ourselves stewing over all our problems or what someone has done to us. And the more we stew the closer to a boil we come. While Paul was in chains for the gospel he could have been stewing on all the things that hadn't worked the way he wanted them to. But he is speaking from a position of knowing injustice and still he is telling us to dwell on the positive. I am many times surprised about the true joy that is in a person's heart that literally has gone through the worst this life has to offer. I am equally surprised how depressed some people get over the littlest things. I believe that Paul is giving us part of the prescription to overcoming the world's downers. If we refuse to give them time in our own brains, but instead replace the thoughts with all those great things Paul tells us to, our disposition will undoubtedly improve. Then while we are thinking about all those great things, Praise God for them. Tell Him thank you! It will change the way your days, weeks, months and, yes, your entire life! goes by. May the Lord Bless your outlook, today and always. Rudy

Life's Priorities

I think I am going to get up on my high horse and preach just a little. I see soooo much difference in the Youth Group this time around than when I served the vacancy before Patra that it just amazes me. So many Youth have decided that it is imperative that they work in addition to school. They all have excuses, many backed up or set in the first place by their parents. But guess when they work? Sunday Morning and Wednesday night. The two times that they had open. They had these times open because it used to be when they went to church. This society as a whole is turning more and more into workaholics. It is an "I got to have it" society. So we borrow money to buy it, then we are a slave to that debt. And we have learned the lesson so well that it is transferring down into our children at an every early age. Jesus says to seek first his kingdom. In fact, He says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33 It is an issue of priority. God should be our only priority. Then we simply let God worry about the jet ski, or the vacation home, or the Beamer. Or even just let God worry about the food on the table. It doesn't matter where your income level is, it is a matter of attitude. Where is your first priority? Where should your only priority be? What is the message your actions are telling the people around you where your priorities are?? Read Matthew 6 and see if it doesn't convict you (it sure does me!) May God bless you with all the riches He has in store for you! Rudy

He Gives

Listen with me for a moment to Luther's version of Psalm 127:2: "It is vain that you rise up early and go to bed late, and eat the bread of sorrow; for so he gives to his beloved in sleep." The NIV text of the last line says, "for he grants sleep to those he loves" but it provides an alternate translation in the footnotes that more closely agrees with Luther's, "for while they sleep he provides for". I do believe that both the alternate text and Luther's gives the more uplifting translation. For I believe that it is Solomon's intent to point us to God as the giver of our income. Yes, the Bible tells us to work, but it also tells us that it is not our work that provides the daily bread. Our income and our daily bread come directly from the Lord. So Solomon, the wisest man that ever walked the face of the earth tells us it is stupid to get up before dawn and work really late just to get ahead in this life. The very first step to an abundant life is to recognize the giver of the gifts; then balance will follow. We won't neglect our friends, kids, spouses all for the sake of getting ahead, only to realize later in life that we screwed up. I have said it a hundred times, if I have said it once. This society is creating workaholics. It is Satan's desire to get us deeply in debt and unable to answer the call of Christ because we are enslaved by the daily grind. Let us acknowledge with the Psalmist, "The eyes of all look to thee, O Lord, and thou givest them their food in due season." (104:27-28) May the Lord provide his bounty in your life, today and always!

Rudy

To the Plain

This last weekend, a number of high school Youth and several other adults shared with me a 'mountain top experience.' We had our fall retreat high in the Rockies. We had good Bible study, emotional prayer sessions and even Worshiped on top of a mountain. Peter, James and John actually got to see Jesus in His glory on top of a mountain. Many of us from this weekend wanted to say with Peter, "It is good for us to be here, Lord, let's build little Mountain cabins, and we'll just stay up here." (Luke 9:33, Rudy's paraphrase version) Sometimes, emotional highs are a good thing. The problem is they don't sustain us for very long and they become addictive. If we just stay on the Mountaintop, we need more and more emotion with less substance. I believe that it is important that we use the emotion as a rallying cry to send us back to the plain. On the plain, there are many hurting people. Luke 9:37 says, "The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him." It was a needy, slow to learn crowd. As we each venture forth today we will be met by a large, needy crowd. What they need is Jesus. And we each retreat on the weekends to be fortified for the onslaught of this needy crowd that meets us head on on Monday morning. After the emotion fades, the true Word of Scripture holds us firm. The true strength of our Lord Jesus is what holds us up as we take each step into this 'unbelieving and perverse generation.' (Luke 9:41) Yes, strive for mountain top experiences, but don't retire there. Come forth to the plain to spread the Good News that we heard proclaimed from the Mountaintops! May the Lord Jesus guide you as you walk the plain throughout this week! Rudy

Barnabas

I think everyone needs to have and to be a Barnabas kind of person. His real name was Joseph (Acts 4:36) but the apostles gave him a "camp name" so to speak, Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement." Just think how neat it would be to have a friend that would have 'son of encouragement' as a nick name. In Acts 9:27 we see Barnabas befriending Saul, soon to be Paul, and speaking on Paul's behalf to the apostles. Just think what might have happened to Paul if Barnabas had not been there to be his friend. Luther thought it was Barnabas that was referred to in 2 Cor 8:18 as the "brother who is praised by all the churches." I am sure that most of us have had times in our lives when we have needed someone to lean on. That's when we reach out for a person with the same spiritual gifts that Barnabas had. Many times that person just serves quietly in the background, just being there for us, not demanding any reward but just giving with their whole heart. After we have had a friend like that, there may come a time when we are called upon by someone else to be their 'son of encouragement.' I think if each of us could take a lesson from Barnabas, our world would be a lot more enjoyable place. Maybe you could even, right now as you read this, think of someone who needs you as a Barnabas today. May the Lord guide your steps today, so that you might get to be a 'son of encouragement' to someone who needs a little 'lean time'! Rudy

Pure Joy??

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." James 1:2-4 This is one of those concepts, that if used on us by a well meaning friend when we need it, cannot be tolerated. So, we need to learn and understand it before the Truth of this passage is needed in our life. We need to understand that it is only through trust in God that He loves us so much and that He is taking the very best care of us, then and only then, can we "consider it pure joy." Let me say it another way. Because we trust in God's wisdom for our lives, we can count all things that come our way as joy. So what we need to work on before the tough trials come is trust. If we can trust God with the little things of life, maybe when the big things come we will be able to hand them over to Him and not let them wreck our entire being. What I am talking about is the firm foundation of Jesus upon which to build our lives. By building our lives, each and every day, on the truths of God's Word instead of the foolishness of this world, we will have a firm foundation when the storms come. And if anyone ever tells you that storms won't come into a Christian's life, ask them to show which Bible they are reading. The one that I read never promises a rose garden, instead it points to the One who gives us strength in the midst of the turmoil. Christ is our strong refuge. He alone is our anchor! Hold us tight, Lord, and assure us of your Love! Rudy

Little Fears

Some of you may know "Yahoo" (her camp name). She is my intern and living with us at the Bauer Household. This is kind of her first real winter in the Rockies and she has come upon a new fear that she hasn't had to deal with in the past. Mice. Our home is in the middle of 30 acres and each night when we turn on our lights, I know we are sending a message to all the mice nearby. Something like, "Come on in, the fire is nice and warm." Anyway, we constantly battle the little creatures and Yahoo is not at all comfortable with the war. She asked me last night about how she was going to overcome her fear of mice. Of course, I told her to give it to God with all the rest of her fears. Her answer surprised me. She told me God wasn't interested in a little fear like those mice. Now, I feel that if you can't practice giving your little fears to God, how will you be able to give up your big fears. I think God allows us to have these little things so we can practice how to do it right. We need to know how the process works and that God is faithful, He will handle the little battles with the same efficiency as the big ones. It builds our trust level. A couple of verses come to mind. 1 Peter 5:7 says to "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." It doesn't say send only your big fears, it says all! Then, of course, there is the old Ps 23 standby, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me." I think we all need to practice giving up our whole life to Jesus. Why try to do some of it ourselves when He is so much better at it? And trust me, I know He cares about the little fears of our lives, for he even has numbered the very hairs upon our head! May the Lord grant you His comfort and peace, in both big and little things! Rudy

Time alone with the Father

My dear sweet Hannah is a very mature 9 now. Even though she is my fifth child, she is my oldest girl. There is a difference between boys and girls. Anyway, last night we got to ride home from the store together -- alone. She prefaced her whole conversation with the request for a private talk with her Father. She explained how she missed her walks to school alone with me. You see, now she has to share those walks with Noah and she can hardly get a word in edge wise. So over the next half hour we talked about a lot of things. Some just catching up, others deep religious truths, that her grasp of absolutely amazed me. It was good quality time with her father, and both daughter and father were better for it. I know our heavenly Father desires our intimate talks, also. He loves to spend time with each and every one of His children. The big difference is, He always has the time. We don't have to share Him with anyone. So what's the excuse? "How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 John 3:1 We can ask, anytime we want to have a private talk with the Father. That is just one of the awesome blessings that are available to us in Jesus Christ; just one of the "bennies" of the relationship. We should desire that time. We should make room for it on our daytimers! We should make it a priority. It will please Our Father. It will help us grow and live our fullest to the Glory of God. It is defiantly a win-win situation! May the Father be very close to you today! Rudy

Impossible

Let's start with this verse. Hebrews 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." So it says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Pretty strong statement. Let's take a look at what faith does for us. We Live by faith, 2Co 5:7, Gal 2:20 We Walk by faith, Ro 4:12 We Face everything in faith, Heb 11:33-39 We Remain true to faith, Ac 14:22 We Continue in the faith, Col 1:23 We Stand firm in the faith, 1Co 16:13, 1Pe 5:9 We Fight for the faith, 1Ti 6:12, Jude 3 We Increase our faith, Lk 17:5 We Grow in faith, 2Th 1:3, Jude 20 We Do everything in faith, Ro 14:22-23 We Pray in faith, Jas 1:5-6 We Overcome sin by faith, 1Jn 5:4-5 We Fight the devil by faith, Eph 6:16 Maybe that's enough to make the point. It is by faith that we live, walk, breath AND please God. How is your faith lately? We are encourage in Jude to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith." (20) I do believe that this has a lot to do with not conforming to the pattern of the world but being transformed (Rom 12:2). The world has nothing good to say about faith, but God says without it we cannot please Him! I'm going for the God side of this one. This is where the love of God transforms from a head knowledge to a heart knowledge -- through faith! God wants us to rely on Him, not ourselves and not the world! It sounds pretty simple until you actually try to do it. It is then you realize that this, too, is a gift from God. Peace on you all, and may God bless you with abundant faith! Rudy

Just a little more on Faith.

As if I didn't say enough about faith yesterday. But... For some reason, a lot of people separate their daily walk in this world from God. They think that their walk with God and their walk in the world are two different walks. Like what in the world does God have to do with getting my car fixed, or having lunch with my friend, or paying bills? God is not simply a priority that you have to fit in with all your other priorities, one that maybe you place a little higher on the list on Sundays. No, God wants to be the very foundation upon which we build our lives. He wants to be the glue that holds us together as we negotiate the tough roads that lie before us. And He does this through faith. "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." 1 John 5:4-5 Last night, I was asked how having a car might glorify God. It is through the eyes of faith that we can see how our walk in all diverse areas of life is meant to glorify God. How He is part of everything we do. How many of you think that the world might own you, say for instance your mortgage. It is through the eyes of faith that you can begin to see how that mortgage fits in with God's plan for your life. Or maybe doesn't fit and should be tossed. It is only through the eyes of faith that this perception of the world; that is, how God wants to use you and the world around you, can come into focus. May God's vision come into focus for you through the eyes of faith! Rudy

Blessed Assurance

"Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, Oh what a foretaste of Glory divine." Some of you are probably wondering what that is a quote from, but for all of us traditional worshipers, it's one of those old standby hymns that we have sung since youth. Even if you don't remember the tune, the words encapsulate a truth that we as believers should be sure of beyond a doubt. We who know Jesus know that one day we will stand with Him in Glory. Of that there is no doubt. You see, Truth is Truth, no matter what our perception is of it. What we think about it does not change what Truth really is. We have to go to the Word of God to get the real story. Out of the fifth chapter of 1 John we have Truth declared: "This is the one who came by water and the blood -- Jesus Christ. ... And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is truth. ... And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (6, 11) We do not need to doubt if we have eternal life or not, it is an assured thing, by the Spirit of Truth. We also have the words that there is a lost and dying generation that needs the Son of God. How can we sit on our backsides and not tell our own friends about the love Jesus has for them?? My very own words convict me! How can I not share the love of Jesus with my very own neighbor that does not know that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life? I rest on the Grace of the Cross for my failures. But, I don't use that Grace as an excuse for inaction for today! Rather it is a rallying cry to go forth and share the great glorious Truth that we have been given. May God's Truth be a Blessed Assurance to you today! Rudy

Love Him?

A wondrous occasion is coming up soon. My Mom's birthday. For anyone close to our family, you know her as Granny. She has truly been a special blessing to me. I really look forward to celebrating her birthday. I even look forward to getting together with the rest of my family, even though there are a few of them that would rather not be around me. I keep praying for my brothers, because they have openly rejected the faith. I even prayed for them this morning; that there might be something I could say this weekend at the wonderful birthday party that might allow them to see the Light. But, alas, I fear all has been tried too many times before and a word from me many times brings anger and open rebellion. So, I will again, as I have for many years just keep praying for their souls and for a time when they might be receptive to the Gospel. It would be easier just to give up, but I know that would not please God. "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." You see, the love of God must transcend all the little petty things that we allow to get in the way of love. None of those things stopped God from loving us! If they had we would be lost -- without hope. But because of that love we can love the ones that it would be easier just to forget about. Because of God's perfect love, we can reach out to a lost and dying world, one brother at a time. So for all you out there in prayer land, say a little prayer that Granny's birthday party might be a happy time where love rules. May the Father of us all show you His love today! Rudy

How, then, shall we live?

I think there comes that day in most people's lives that they ask themselves the question, "Why should I even get out of bed?" I am thinking that this is a great moment in a life. You see, until God has removed all the self-sufficiency from us we are not ready to serve Him. Once we realize that our own human ability is far from able to complete the task at hand we are getting closer to being a useful tool for God. Once we learn the discipline of waiting for the Lord to act instead of charging in and doing it ourselves, just because we are board with the inaction; it is then that God may take notice of our patient waiting and see fit to use us in His plan. You see, folks, it is 100% God and 0% us. It's that way with salvation, and it's that way with life. Jesus says, "apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 I think it is a daily battle to push down our own desire to take control and just do it our way versus letting God have the helm. Just this week, I used the verse that says without faith it is impossible to please God, (Heb 11:6). Whenever we are making a decision, I think we need to look very carefully at the weight that we are giving worldly decision tools, i.e., 'due diligence' or 'cost benefit analysis' versus good old fashioned prayer and discernment. The Bible is full of examples where God calls His faithful to do something that is totally against logic just to see where their faith is. If their faith is in themselves to accomplish the tasks they will not move forward. If their faith is in God the odds are irrelevant! Am I saying be stupid? No way. I am saying be faithful! May God bless you with the eyes of faith, so that your deeds might glorify Him! Rudy

Wonderful and Frail

Life has its share of sufferings. None of us are immune. It does seem sometimes that some people led a "charmed" life, but I am pretty sure that there are troubles everywhere. Even our bodies, as exquisite as they are, still are frail and fleeting. God wants us to love life; but not too much. God wants us to have care and respect for our bodies, but again, I believe not too much. Not to the exclusion of caring for Him. Or even to the exclusion of caring for each other. Pains of our body and pains in our life help us realize that this world is not our home. Heaven is the place where sin will have no power over us and perfect reunion and communication with our God will be our every source of joy."So, then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." 1 Peter 4:19 I really think that all of us will at times "suffer according to God's will." That does not mean that God is a cruel tyrant that wants to see us suffer. There is always an outcome that glorifies God. Just one of the minor results of suffering might just be to help us let go of our love of life in this world just enough to long for the joys of heaven. God is truly a kind and loving God that desires only the best for us. He just has an eternal perspective where ours to often is shortsighted. Many times our only goal might be to get through the day. Instead, let us place our eyes on the heavenly goal that Jesus won for us with the ultimate suffering. May the Lord give you insight into life's present trials. RudyPS Thank you all for your prayers for Dena. I believe that she is on the slow road of recovery. I am looking forward to a smile today!

Tired and Angry?

Noah, my 5 year old son, about whom many of these devos were focused on last year, has really come a long ways. He is doing well in Kindergarten and has really grown and matured. However, he still gets tired, just like we do sometimes. Last night, on the way home he decided to use his old methods of persuasion. He wanted us to turn the air on full blast in the car on the way home from together. He started asking in a scream and had a smooth transition into kicking my seat. Of course, he knows from experience that this is not the way to convince me of anything, but once the tired and angrys set in, he didn't stop to think of the consequences, he just tried to bully his way through. We each have been taught how God wants us to approach Him in prayer. But there are times, just like Noah, when we get tired and angry towards God. Tired because maybe He doesn't act in the time frame that we think he should act. Or angry because it seems like God is not listening to our very important intercession. I think it helps for us to review "Communication with the Father -- 101" every once in a while just to keep our approach right. Jesus was definitely tired when He was talking to the Father in the Garden, but He was still able to let go of the control. "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Matthew 26:42b Aren't we glad that Jesus didn't pick that time to forget about submission?? The salvation of the entire world hung in the balance! Thank you, Jesus for your example and for our salvation. May we always join you in saying, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." May the Lord guide you in the path that He has set before you! Rudy

Attitude

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Eph 4:22-24

Some times I get an attitude. Now I know this may shock some of you, but when I get an attitude, I usually expect the whole world to bend just for me. I have noticed, in some objective part of my mind, that when I walk into a room with a bad attitude, I can change the mood of everyone in the room all by myself. It is not a good thing. I have also wrestled with how to change a bad attitude into something more positive. I have found that I really can "put off my old self" and "put on the new self." Prayer, as with all things, helps. Also taking care of myself, like eating and sleeping helps. But, if I want to bad enough, I can literally change my bad mood just by deciding to do so. I can decide that the meeting doesn't have to go south just because of my bad mood. I believe that this is because of the new creation that is within me because of Jesus Christ. That new creation is available for us whenever we decide we have had enough of the world working it's way through us. I guess this devo is just for all of you who might also suffer along with me of a bad attitude from time to time. I hope you, too, have realized that with the gift of Jesus you can put on your new self. Hey, I have an idea. Why don't we just leave our "new self" on? What a concept. May you be able to where the new clothes today! Rudy

Good Day

There are days that whatever you do seems to just work right. I was just reading the Psalms and happened onto Psalm 139. The day David wrote that must have been a good day for him. This morning it spoke to my soul, spirit and body. So I think I'll just share it with you. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I go from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ... For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." May this day be a good one for you! Rudy

Sin is like a dirty diaper

With the exception of a six month break, Dena and I have had at least one kid in diapers for over 20 years! We are in the process of potty training our last diaper clad kid. Naomi is three and really has the concept down, she just hasn't had the "want to" up until now. I'll try and put this delicately, but if you are reading this while you are eating, you may want to wait for one or the other. Naomi has picked up a little bug that has manifested itself in the form of diarrhea. All of a sudden, Naomi has the "want to" for this potty training idea. She would much rather have us take her to the pot than have that stuff burn her little butt. So I was thinking how much sin is like that burning diaper. Confession is like getting that diaper changed. It feels so good to get the load off our mind. But when it comes time to sin again, shouldn't we be like Naomi and have the "want to" not to sin again. Don't we remember how bad it was the last time?? Yes, confession feels good, but not good enough to keep on sinning so that we can keep on confessing. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin: how can we live in it any longer?" Romans 6:1-2 We are all in the process of potty training, and I suppose it will continue until the day we die. But maybe today we can please Our Father, and not have to come to Him again, soiled with the same old sin. May sin decrease and Grace abound in your day! Rudy

Meaningful Conversation

Picture this. Last night I came home fairly late from a meeting at church. Everyone had gotten ready for bed, so I get comfortable in my Laz-i-boy and soon little Naomi, my three year old comes out to crawl up on Daddy's lap. Soon she is snoozing peacefully. Meanwhile, one of my older kids comes out to have a meaningful conversation with Dad. So we are talking away, but the next thing I remember is Dena waking me up to come to bed. I felt sooo bad that I had fallen asleep during the meaningful conversation. All I could say was I was sorry, AND isn't it neat that Our Father doesn't fall asleep on us during our meaningful conversations with Him???"This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked of him." 1 John 5:14-15 I am so glad that when I wake in the middle of the night with a heavy heart I can pray -- right then, and know that he is busy listening to me! Now turn my little picture around. How sad it would be if Our Father is sitting up in the living room waiting to have a meaningful conversation with us before our bedtime and we are "no shows." I think that just might sadden His heart. Which one of us wouldn't want to have that meaningful conversation with the Father? His holy Word promises us that He is listening; don't forget to talk! May the Lord of all bless you and keep you in His loving arms! Rudy

In front of your nose

Let me quote an obscure, Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah 60:3 says, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the dawn of your brightness." This prophecy is talking about the coming of the Messiah. Remember the (three) kings from afar came to worship Jesus at His birth? It is absolutely beautiful the way the prophet puts it: "the dawn of your brightness." But because we are on the other side of the prophecy, we know that it was a humble beginning in a stable. It is possible that if you had been standing outside the stable when Jesus was born, you might have chocked up the whole thing to just some homeless people down on their luck. But, yet, that is how the Creator of the Universe chose to send His Son into the world. So He clued us in. For the common working class, He sent a sky full of angels to proclaim the "dawn of His brightness." But for the kings from afar, there were much more subtle signs in the sky. Well, and one not so subtle. But, still it took faith for them to carry out their journey to worship the king of a distant land. God reveals His mysteries to us. Without His gift of faith we haven't a chance to even catch a glimpse of what is going on. But the second God opens our eyes, we are able to see the "dawn of brightness" come to a lost and dying world. We are able to see inside that lonely stable and see that what is going on inside there is enough to fill the whole world with Grace. Please look at the words of God through the eyes of faith, not through the eyes of an unbelieving world. The difference in what you see is life changing. May your eyes be opened to the Brightness of the Dawn! Rudy

A Bear in the Tree

Well, all the talk around here this morning is the bear that was rooting through our garbage last night. Aaron, my 16 year old scared him out of the trash when he went to feed the horses. Then I got in on the act and found that he had taken refuge in a tree not far away. So Aaron and I both looked at him with the flashlight. But when he stretched out a little and we could see more of his body, I started assessing how far it was to the house and whether I was up for a run. Luckily, he wasn't starting down the tree, just trying to get a better look at us. Sometimes in our urbanized comfort, many of the Biblical sayings that have to do with analogies to wild things kind of miss their mark. Take for instance the Proverb in 17:12 that says, "Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly." Or the NET version says, "than a fool carried away with his stupidity." My guess is that doesn't mean much to most of us, because we haven't met a mommy bear robbed of her young. But for just a moment last night, maybe I had some insight into how scared I should be when I meet a fool carried away with his own stupidity. I have been talking a lot lately about looking through the eyes of faith instead of using the worldly wisdom to walk by. I really think each of us might be a "fool" carried away with our own stupidity when we rely on the wisdom of the world without the eyes of faith. In Proverbs 3:5 we are told to not rely on our own understanding but to acknowledge God is all our ways and He will make our paths straight. It's all the same message. The more we walk by faith the better off we are. May the Lord keep you from the fool's way and guide you with His understanding! Rudy

God is Good

I would love to share a piece of my weekend with you. Actually, I took a lot of pictures, so maybe you could get a glimpse when they come back. I was blessed to have a little time with my oldest son on his fall break from college. A total of six* of us went into the mountain wilderness area west of here. The weather was perfect; the scenery was awesome! The heavens and earth truly did declare God's Glory. But what was most pleasing to me was to be with Christian young men who know what they believe about God and live it out in their actions. The six of us worshiped together in a high alpine aspen grove. Each of the boys were asked to give a little homily on a scripture, and the Word was truly preached!"The heavens declare the glory of God: the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Psalm 19:1 Each of us need to take time away to seek God and His goodness for our lives. Yes, we need time each day, but we also need time set apart in a little larger block, either with good Christian friends or all by ourselves. It is no wonder the monks wanted to live a life set apart, because there is such peace that can be found. But, we must remember the peace that is found is to be shared with the people on the plain. However, if we don't find the time to spend with our God away from our fast paced lives, then we become the needy people. Each of us need to purposely schedule our special time away. Oh, and by the way. If you would like to go to that same high alpine aspen grove, just let me know; I love being the tour guide!May the Lord of All find a place in your daytimer!Rudy*Jason, my oldest; Zachary my next oldest; Chris, Jason's friend from college; Kale, another of Jason's friends from college; and Dane, Kale's younger brother, and myself, of course.

The "Liability"

How about another story from this past weekend, where I got to go hiking with 5 young whippersnappers? We had made camp and decided to explore the canyon above where we had camped. It was full of very large boulders that we scrambled from one to another. This, of course, was great fun for the young bones of the group, but I was 25 years older than any of the other participants. It was soon evident that I was the "liability" in the group. There was this one time where these guys just went sailing from one rock to another. I looked at the jump, however, and said, "No way!" So, they came up with a plan to get me across this gulf between the two rocks. My oldest son got down between the rocks and put his foot on the side of the one I was on. I used that as a foot hold and proceeded to do the splits to the other rock. Since I was stuck, one of the other boys grabbed my hand on the other side and pulled me up. (Jason said he heard my bones pop!) It was a good thing I had at least two other helpers in that situation, or I might just still be on that rock. "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ... A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Ecc 4:9-10, 12b We were not meant to go through this life alone. We need a friend to help us up when life's problems get us down. It is not a weakness to say that we need to lean on someone everyone once in a while. It is the blessing of a Christian community around us that allows us to get through the tough times. A "cord of three strands" might even refer to me, my friend, and God. With that combo, how can anyone go wrong? Sometimes it's OK to lean! May you feel the warmth and support of your friends and your God! Rudy

Gladness of Heart

Gladness of heart is a gift of God. I see people who only strive for more with no happiness. Whatever their motivation; to keep up with the Jones or to satisfy their bellies, it is all a waste of the great days that God has given us. Yesterday the stress seemed so thick I could cut it with a knife. I even needed a prescription to take care of it. I searched and searched and finally self medicated my stress with a very comforting lunch with a few of my friends in the kitchen at church. It was a lunch of leftovers, pulled out of the church's refrigerator, but it was seasoned with love and joy. It was a pause on a calm island in the middle of the sea of cares and worries that allowed me to continue with the rest of the day. I think Solomon had a little stress later in his life. He realized that blessings without happiness is worse than no blessings at all. "When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work -- this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart." Ecc 6:19-20 I thank God for sending me friends that allow me to see the gladness of heart that He wants for all of us. The only way that lunch could have been better would have been if each one of you could have been there. Take a moment today and share a word with a friend. It is the seasoning that makes this life palatable. May the Lord bless your life with gladness of heart. Rudy

Teachable Moments

There are times when we as human learners are 1000% more receptive to learning than the majority of the rest of our lives. Most teachers know this; many parents know this. Even though most of us know this, it still bears repeating. When some concept is brought to the surface by a situation that you are experiencing, at that very moment we are much more likely to learn the concept. It happened last night with my daughter, Hannah. She saw a mouse. We had the opportunity to reinforce that God is God of our fears, no matter what size package they come in. She will remember that concept now, more than ever, because of the intense moment in which it was taught. Jesus also illustrated this style of teaching. In fact, most of His parables are exactly this type of teaching. One that comes to mind is the "heads of grain incident." It is recorded in Mark 2:23 and following. He and His disciples were "caught" picking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. He took the opportunity to give an old testament lesson to the Pharisees. Then He gives us the "kernel" of truth. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (27-28) The relevant part of all this is that God still uses teachable moments in our lives. Sometimes, maybe even most of the time, we might not be willing to listen. Sometimes the fear of the moment overshadows the teaching that God is trying to get through to us. This is why we need to take every situation to the Lord in prayer -- and then listen. May the Lord guide you and keep you safe! Rudy

Men on Wallets

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 I would like to give you a little mental image today. If by chance you don't agree with me on this one, I think I'll let it slide. But I think I have finally figured out why Peter was the only one to walk to Jesus on the water, (Mat 14:29). Yes, of course, Peter had the Spiritual gift of faith, for it was also Peter that first vocalized that Jesus was the Son of God. And, yes, we often think of Peter as one quick to act and slow to think; another characteristic of the gift of faith. But, I think that each of the other disciples in the boat didn't walk to Jesus on the water because they were worried that they would get their wallets wet. You see, they were sitting on their wallets to keep them safe. I do believe that God will often use an example of a person with faith to step out where all can see, allow that person to sink just a little, and then save the guy, just so the "Men on Wallets" can see what's going on. Maybe, just maybe, the action might cause just one or two of the "Men on Wallets" to stand up and free up some of their wallet capacity. I have noticed another thing about people of faith. Most of the time they either don't have a wallet or it's empty. This is not just because they planned to walk on water that day. It is because if God filled their wallet then they would just fund the whole whatever and the "Men on Wallets" would not ever get a chance to be drug along. You see God wants everyone to catch on, and He is willing to frustrate the ones that are willing to step out in hopes of motivating the ones still in the boat. Are you still sitting? May the Lord get through to each of us today! Rudy

Part of Your Day

Yesterday was Noah's Birthday. (My 6 year old son) Two of his friends got to join Noah at Chuck E. Cheese's for two hours of non stop eating and playing and games; basically just non stop fun for a six year old boy. Now I must admit, once you're my age, spending two hours at a restaurant that has exceeded their occupancy load with six year olds celebrating their birthdays is not something I would choose to do everyday. But for the "three amigos" it was just about heaven. Picture if you will your counterpart to the birthday party I just described. If someone could invite you to be part of their day and they were going to do the absolute best thing in the world, what would that be? Now realize that that is what God does for us each day. Today God invites us to be part of His day. This is a day that He has designed with you in mind. Just you. There will be no other day like this day, either for you again or for anyone else. And into it, God has invited you to share the most exciting thing in the world; to be part of His great plan. To be able to share His great story with someone for the first time. To be able to serve a great meal for someone who is hungry. Or maybe to be able to share your coat with someone who is cold. Or even maybe, just to look towards heaven and Praise the Creator of the Universe. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph 2:10 Pray that God will invite you to share in His great day. I am pretty sure He is waiting for you. May your day be a most awesome fun time! Rudy

Urging from the Spirit

I don't know how I talk about this subject and still remain credible. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that there are times when the Holy Spirit urges me towards action. Yet, it is so difficult to describe how to "know" anything for sure. I believe ultimately, it is a gift of faith that allows us to trust that we are being guided by God and not just by our own sinful yearnings; which, by the way, never totally get out of the picture. The Holy Spirit communicates to our spirit, but our mind and body are always in the way. That is why Paul gives us this "formula" in Romans 12. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship." Now listen carefully to the next verse. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will." The Word transforms our mind as we daily read it and "inwardly digest it." As we put it into practice each day of our lives and daily die to the selfish ways of this world, then we can begin to gain a little insight without all the clutter caused by our own sinful self. But still, even though it sounds like something we do, all of this is just in response to what God has already done. And, He will come to us on His own terms in His own time, not on some prescribed timetable that we might have. Patience is a hard one for me. But it has to go hand in hand with the renewing of our minds. If you think you are being nudged by the Spirit in a direction, check it out with Scripture, then follow it; see what happens. I think God talks to us in little things first, kind of like teaching a baby to talk. As we become more proficient and grow in our listening skills, He might choose to talk more. Listen for His still small voice as you live out today. May the Lord's presence always be a blessing and an assurance to you! Rudy

One Blood

Now days, with our amazing medical knowledge, we know that all blood is not alike. This week our church will be launching a nationwide search for the right kind of blood to help a very sick young lady in our congregation. This blood, if found, may help prolong her earthly life. But the real joy is that the blood that has really helped her has already done its work. She has the assurance of salvation through the one Blood of Jesus that was the right type for all of us. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." Romans 3:23-25 We have learned that the power of the right blood match here on earth may save an earthly life -- for a time. However, it is the next door, which we will all have to pass through sooner or later, that the true miracle of life is present. God chose the Blood of Jesus Christ, His most precious Son, to be shed for our account. Indeed, a nation wide search was done and no other than Jesus was found with the right blood type for you and me. His righteous blood was what was needed to present us with a pure white robe; the correct dress to enter the eternal wedding feast of our God. How great the assurance which is offered by His Blood! There is no other comfort on this earth like it. Blessed be the Name of Jesus. May you truly grasp the assurance which God has for you! Rudy

Stuff I have stuff piled up around me.

If I were to ever move again, I doubt if a Semi could handle all the stuff. Books are one of my great stuff things. Then there is equipment to have fun with, you know backpacks, sleeping bags, skis; more stuff. Then, you see, I am also a collector. I have boxes of hundred year old sheet music and boxes of 45 and 78 records; all with the idea of someday opening an antique store, (when I have nothing else to do.) Just stuff. Of course, if anyone ever tried to make me make a choice of what I should keep, it would all have to stay. Some people call me a pack rat. Sometimes, when I am broke, I think I should sell all my stuff. But, frankly, it not worth much to most people. I think we might have a similar relationship to God as my stuff has to me. Even the stuff that just sits around and does nothing is still precious to me. I still have hopes that one day it will earn it's keep. Or even stuff that I am using right now, but will someday outlive its usefulness is still valuable to me. There are times that we just sit around trying to guess what we are supposed to do next; we are still valuable to God. Or maybe we even think there's not much left for us to do; I think God will retool and use us some more. We are way too precious to God that He might ever think of letting us go. We are His eclectic collection; put together by God Himself. Only the Master may actually know the Master Plan. "In a large house there are articles not only of Gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work." 2 Timothy 2:20-21 May the Master's hand use you today for a noble work! Rudy

In a crowd, all alone

Sometimes I feel the most alone when I am in a crowd of people that I don't know. Especially if I don't really share anything in common with the crowd. It's even almost worse if people are talking to you but make no effort to introduce themselves or find out who you are. It's almost like it doesn't even matter who you might be, just another meaningless face in a meaningless crowd. I suppose that these situations are bound to happen to all of us at one time or another. The secret weapon that we have, however, is that we are never alone. Do you know that Jesus is with you? Do you know that He cares for you even when all others might have lost interest? Do you know that nothing can separate you from the Love that Christ has for you? In writing to Timothy, Paul paints a pretty bleak picture of his situation near the end of his life. But he was still not alone. "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen" 2 Timothy 4:16-18 Robert Frost writes a poem about two roads in a yellow wood. He says that because he chose the less traveled road in his life it has made all the difference. I believe that what has truly made all the difference in my life is that Jesus has chosen me. I am not and will never be alone. I hope you share that confidence! May the Lord of our salvation assure you of His presence today! Rudy

Daddy Hug

I was fortunate enough to get to have a little road trip back to Seward where my oldest son is attending college on this past reformation weekend. It was a great weekend because I got to see my son. It was a great weekend because I got "Daddy Hugs" from some of my "adopted" daughters that also attend at Seward. It was a great weekend because I got to sing "A Mighty Fortress" with hundreds of other believers along with a fantastic pipe organ. I also got to ponder the Reformation, where the Holy Spirit through Luther pointed us back to the inerrant Word that says "we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Rom 3:28 But I am saddened by this whole controversy concerning "decision theology." Simply put, later believers say that you have to know the moment that you accepted God; and do the accepting. It kind of puts the damper on the whole Reformation thing. It is simply a lie that tries to turn us back towards our own doing for salvation. It turns it back into salvation by works. For those that might be confused on the issues, I would have you read John chapter 6. It is here that Jesus Himself says that salvation is a gift from the Father, even the faith that is required to be saved is a gift from the Father. It is like the biggest "Daddy Hug" of all! In explaining it to His disciples Jesus says, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." (John 6:65) God "enables" us. Without God's enabling, our simple nature is caught under the law. And there is no route to heaven through the law. Thank you, Father, for the Daddy Hug of Jesus. What an awesome gift! May the faith and assurance of the gift of Jesus be a constant comfort! Rudy

Sealed

I think that one of the reasons that I have been talking about our assurance of salvation so much lately are some conversations that I have been having with our part time visitation Pastor at our church. You know, he is the one that visits all the "old folks" when they might not be able to get to church. It is a ministry of comfort and hope, one that my Father-in-law was doing before he passed away. Sometimes, even though we have been raised in the church our whole lives, there are times that we might doubt the assurance of our salvation. It is amazing the number of times that Scripture tells us that this is not one of the doubts that we should have. One verse that I just happened on this morning is one of my favorites, because it uses that wonderful analogy of being sealed. "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory." Eph 1:13-14

With all the hype about the Left Behind books, this verse is good sound theology. It is hard to miss interpret it because it is so straight forward. We are sealed. The assurance of heaven is ours. And whether you are young and have your whole life ahead of you or have lived your life and are looking forward to rest with Jesus, this verse gives us that wonderful peace of Knowing for sure about where we get to go. "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine." May the Lord God almighty who sealed you before the foundation of the world, gently nudge you with His presence today! Rudy

Darkness

"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:3-4 It is very difficult to talk about God the Father "enabling us" to come to Jesus (yesterday's devo) without looking at the same time to this verse in Timothy. Many people get hung up on this whole thing and I really think it is that we, at times, just want to play God. We want to say, "Why this person and not this person, Lord?" The fact is, stated very clearly in this verse, that God the Father wants all people to be in heaven with Him. Not some, ALL. So, you ask, why is heaven not full and hell empty? "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." John 3:19 Once God has enabled us to come to Jesus, we can still choose darkness over the light. This is the very reason, once we are saved, that we should strive not to sin. Not because our own righteousness will save us, but because our own deeds of darkness might re-enslave us. We might, once we have seen the light, choose the path of darkness instead of the saving Grace of Jesus. It is for this reason that we should put to death the sin that is within us. We are no longer enslaved by that sin, once we have seen the saving light of Jesus. But how often do we choose to go back to the life of sin that once enslaved us? It is a daily battle. That sin forms a barrier between us and God and must be removed by His Grace so that it will not destined us to hell. Praise God for Grace! May the Lord of Grace shower you with His blessings today! Rudy

Uni-Mind

Science Fiction, in general, has this reoccurring theme of a single mind controlling many people. In Buzzlightyear-Star Command it is the Uni-Mind and it starts out good but of course the bad guy wants it for himself to control the Universe. In Star Trek, it is the Borg, and there it is bad, because in Star Trek individual freedom is the Prime Directive. Our Uni-mind in Christ is the real thing, not just fiction. When Paul is talking to us about the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians, he explains that "we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (12:13) But then he goes on to explain how as individuals we are each given different and unique assignments to do. That's where the rub seems pop up. We each go off and do our own thing and forget that we were all baptized with one and the same Spirit. And that Spirit is not a spirit of chaos or disorder. Instead it is a Spirit that brings us together to "shine like the stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." Philippians 2:15-16 Think of the night sky. Yes, we can and do often focus on this star or that one. But when the night sky is taken as a whole is an awesome thing to behold. Would it not be fantastic if even we, the Body of Christ, were to look upon ourselves as one great whole? I don't know how that we purpose to do this without sacrificing our doctrine; but somehow we have to recognize Christ in each other and realize that he is the common bond that holds us together. He is not an evil mind that wants to remove all individuality. He rather wants each of us to shine as bright as we can while making up a part of an awesome whole. May you greet one another with the handshake of peace and give glory to Our Father in heaven! Rudy

Lost

Have you ever lost anything? This summer I lost my Swiss Army Knife. Actually I didn't lose it, I had to give it up when I took the Youth Group to Elitch's. I guess being in downtown Denver, the theme park, recently bought by Six Flags, decided they had to offer a safe environment for their patrons. So, they installed metal detectors. And they caught me trying to sneak in with a Swiss Army Knife. Anyway, they gave me a little claim check and I was supposed to claim my knife when I left at the end of the day. Well, being the rocket scientist that I am, I forgot. So my Swiss Army knife was lost. Several times after that, I thought of going back to get it. I even kept the claim check for a month or so. But, I am sure they periodically round up all the knives that people have left and sell them off or something. I guess that knife just wasn't important enough to me to go back and "redeem" it from the park. How big does something have to be before it becomes important enough? We were important enough to God that He sent Jesus all the way to earth to redeem us. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10 Now it is our turn. How important does someone have to be for us to go out of our way to tell them about the good news of our salvation? Something that we can share with them for free! But, alas, we are awfully busy. Lots of things to fill up our days with. We may just never get around to that little time commitment it takes to share that good news with someone. I wonder if that someone is any more important than my Swiss Army knife? May the Lord of our salvation give us correct priorities! Rudy

True Son of God

I was drawn to C.S. Lewis this morning. The man is so deep that everything he writes I must read a third and fourth time just to get it. But when I get it! what insight the man possessed. I have been told that he had a little group which he called the Inklings which included J.R.R. Tolkien among others that would meet, sip beer till the wee hours and talk deep thoughts. Being a family man, I don't have the wee hours to give up. But the thought is still a good one for each of us. We should be involved in a group or groups that stretch us beyond our thought limits. We should have ample practice in verbalizing our faith with friends so when we are called upon to talk with strangers the words are rehearsed. But anyway, the following quote is one of my favorite from C.S. Lewis. It first appeared in *The Problem of Pain*, Chap 1, para 14. "There was a man born among the Jews who claimed to be, or to be the son of, or to be 'one with' the Something which is at once the awful haunter of nature and the giver of the moral law. The claim is so shocking -- a paradox, and even a horror, which we may easily be lulled into taking too lightly -- that only two views of this man are possible. Either he was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else he was, and is, precisely what He said. There is no middle way. If the records make the first hypothesis unacceptable, you must submit to the second. And if you do that, all else that is claimed by Christians becomes credible -- that this Man, having been killed, was yet alive, and that His death, in some manner incomprehensible to human thought, has effected a real change in our relations to the 'awful' and 'righteous' Lord, and a change in our favor." If that is too deep for you like it is for me, maybe you can just follow Peter's example and proclaim by the Holy Spirit, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mat 16:16 May you be blessed today by the Presence of the Son of the Living God! Rudy

Enslaved

Last Sunday in our Young Adult Bible class one of our members asked how he might respond to his Young Life kids about smoking pot. We had a good discussion, gave him some direction but then the subject changed to: could you adequately witness to a person about a sin if you had never experienced the sin. First, I want to assure you that I did not condone that everyone go out and try pot. Second, I pointed out that everyone has experienced sin. In fact, each and every one of us has been enslaved by sin. But, thanks be to Jesus, we have been set free from that slavery. So the net effect of the class was, each of us are equipped to talk with anyone about sin, even if we have not experienced that particular perversion, simply because we have had to deal with our own sin. Now, how have we dealt with our own sin? Have we struggled against it like Paul? Or do we say, "What's the use, I'm going to fall anyway, might as well get to it?" (By the way, in case you were confused, the last option is the wrong thing to do.) Jesus Himself, is interested in the way we live our lives after we have been saved. Not for our salvation's sake, but for the sake of our witness to the world. Jesus says in Rev 4:19, (and He is talking to us in the church!): "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Yes, Jesus cares about how we live our lives and Yes, He has great things in store for us. Repent and answer the door! May the Love of Jesus come through your door today! Rudy

Credibility

It is absolutely amazing what one must do to gain credibility with one's peers. And also how easily that credibility can be trashed with little or no effort. Yesterday, I was sitting in a meeting with high powered Christian leaders of this town and watched another (not me, Praise God) go through the "fundraising credibility check." It was not a pretty sight. For where one might be willing to accept another based on the bond of belief in Jesus, just ask for someone to get out there check book and the story changes. Why, I ask you? It seems that we are all willing to use spiritual guidance for making decisions right up and until it concerns money. I am so glad that God's approval of us is not contingent on our credit rating or our checkbook balance. Now it does have sometime to do with who we know. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim 2:5 However, He didn't pull a credit check before He would talk with us. He didn't call our reference list before He went to the cross for our sins. He didn't even wait for us to seek Him out before He loved us. If we all had to where a sign showing all our faults and why people shouldn't trust us, we probably couldn't even get in the door of a bar. But Jesus sees all of those things and He still signed up to be our mediator -- the One that all those things fall on. My burden is light because Jesus is shouldering the load! Praise God our Almighty Father for sending us His Son to love us just as we are! May He bless you mightily today! Rudy

Stronghold

How's your heart? Spiritual warfare buzzwords include the word "stronghold." This usually indicates an area where we think that the emissaries of Satan are gathered. It comes in part from the verse in 2 Corinthians 10:4 and following that says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ." So sometimes we might say that a town that has devoted itself to perversion, like the Biblical Sodom, could be a stronghold. But today I would like to turn inward. Our hearts are metaphorically considered to be the center of our emotions; the center of all the good things which we might accomplish in our time. But the heart can also be a corrupt and filthy place. Jesus says, "Out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Mat 15:19) Before we can have any effect on the world or even our buddy we have to do a little house cleaning of our own. We must take our hearts back from Satan and give them over to God. This is one of those daily activities. However, just like my office, if you haven't paid attention to it in a while, it might take some work the first time out. The way to start is by checking every thought that comes or goes and taking it "captive" and make it obedient to Christ. Tall order? It's a daily thing, with Christ's help. Make sure your heart is a stronghold for Christ! Peace people. God loves you and so do I! Rudy

Glimpse of Grace

We had a wonderful little Bible study yesterday at the college. It's been going on long enough that some relationships are being developed and that allows us to get below the surface and just begin to scratch at the really important stuff. We discussed the fact that in each one of our lives we had come to the point when we realized that we could not satisfy our "inward longing" with the pleasures of this world. It is when each of us get to that place that God begins to give us a glimmer of His Grace. C.S. Lewis puts it this way, "God gives His gifts where He finds the vessel empty enough to receive them." (1) Once we find ourselves left empty by the promises of this world -- and we recognize the emptiness -- God can begin to fill us with his Grace. I have been thinking about Grace lately. I think it is one of those things that is bigger on the inside than it first appears from the outside. Paul quotes Isaiah 64 when in 1 Corinthians 2:9 he tries to verbalize this concept. "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Isaiah continues to tell us that "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." It is exactly when we realize that all our righteousness is no better than pond scum that God can begin to fill us up with His Grace. So look with the eyes of your spirit at just how big God's Grace really is. It is really big enough to take whatever you or I have done. It is really much bigger once we come in than when we were just looking from the outside. Praise God for His amazing Grace! May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and forever! Rudy(1) "Williams and the Arthuriad" (1948) p. 340

A Full Plate

After church yesterday, I was sitting at the lunch table with my dear little Naomi who is three. Granny, (my Mom) had fixed one of Naomi's favorite meals; spaghetti with meat balls. Except Granny has the meat balls separate so that you can take a lot of them. I had given Naomi 5 to start with and they were gone in seconds. I think if the big meat eater himself, T. Rex, had a small cousin it would be Naomi; she likes meat. So she was asking for more. I finally gave in and gave her three more, with the stipulation that she needed to eat some other food. With a full plate and three meat balls, Naomi proceeded to ask me for a meat ball off my plate. She had decided that more was the only issue, even when she had a full plate! How much is enough? When God quits dishing it out do we turn to our neighbor and ask for his? What is a healthy mix between ambition and being satisfied with what you have? Where is contentment found? Will you or I ever get to the place where Paul made it to? "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:12-13 Satan knows that if we truly trust in God to supply our needs that he has lost a major manipulative tool. How many of us stress out about money more than anything else? Let's just see if we can be content with the blessings that are on our plate right now. Maybe we should try to handle them well just like a good and faithful servant would do. May the Lord open your eyes to His many blessings. Rudy

Understand Grace

Where did you first understand Grace? I am not talking head knowledge. I am talking about truly knowing in your heart what Grace was. I think for me, I first learned Grace from my Mother. It was her unconditional love for a little boy that first gave me the seeds to understand, in just the simplest way, what the biggest concept in all the world was to mean to me. Now if, by chance, a person never learned Grace as a child or an adult, I think it is much more difficult to accept the Grace that Jesus has for us. It is a powerful thing indeed to be able to lay our burden at the foot of the cross and leave it there. But with no concept of Grace one might be tempted to pick up that burden again and continue to shoulder it alone. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 It is the "rest for our souls" that we so desperately need in order to get up and continue to function in this "vale of tears." Without the rest that Jesus gives, the grind will wear us down. But with it -- WOW! We can soar on wings like eagles, even when we work with turkeys! We can delight in God's plan for our lives and live for Him, not just our selfishness. Glory be to Jesus who gives us freely of His Grace. Thanks be to the Father who draws us to His Son. Seek Grace and pursue it; for it is a most wonderful thing! May the grace of Jesus, our Lord, be with you today! Rudy

More Grace

Maybe you can tell that I am starting a class on Grace for the Youth Group. Anyway, I have been trying to come up with a way to share with them that Grace, although very simply defined, is not simply understood. The short definition is "God's unmerited favor towards men." But I am going to share with you the allegorical definition as presented by C.S. Lewis in *The Last Battle*. Remember, this is a fictional story about another world, and children from our world who travel there. They have just gone through a Stable door that once they are on the other side they realize they are in heaven. "It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the Stable seen from within and the Stable seen from without are two different places." "Yes," said Queen Lucy. "In our world too, a Stable once held something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." "To understand that Grace, once you are on the inside is a much different place that when you look at it from the outside, I think, is the beginning of it's understanding. Then to begin to glimpse that the whole world could not contain the Grace of God is another baby step in it's understanding. Thoughts? Anyone have some great examples for my Youth group? I pray that your Day is full of God's Grace!

Rudy

Crossing Over

There is this favorite campsite of mine in Lost Creek Wilderness Area. From the main trail you can just glimpse the sweetness of this campsite, although it is really hidden from view. However, there is this sizable creek that one must traverse to get to the campsite. It's not huge, but certainly can't be jumped. In one place there are these logs that someone from before has laid down for easy access across the creek. But judging by the wear on both sides of the creek, easily over 50% of the hikers decide that the risk of the logs is not worth whatever might be up the canyon, where my favorite campsite is. So they have never seen it. Which pleases me just fine. As we are looking at Jesus and the salvation He offers, I believe many think that the "crossing over" is even more perilous than walking a log above a creek. When in fact the better analogy is that Jesus Himself will carry you across that log. But I am finding that being carried might even take more faith than walking the log for oneself. In reality, it is the easiest thing in the world. Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24 Won't you be the one that points out the log and helps a person to find the faith to cross over? It is a great calling; to carry the words of Jesus to all those trapped on the wrong side of the creek! May the Lord bless your words and your actions! Rudy

On the Road Again

Since I am off to Midwest City, OK for the weekend, I thought I would just do news today. I might slip in a Bible Verse, just because old habits are so hard to change. Anyway, I won't be writing Monday since I'll be on my way back from OK. Big shin dig down there where my Father-in-law preached way back when Dena was in Pre school. For anyone that might be in the area over Thanksgiving, I am sponsoring the annual Christmas Tree Cutting Extravaganza, Saturday, a week from tomorrow. 10AM my place, then we venture into the deep Colorado woods in search of the perfect tree. More info: 460-0404. As we approach this wonderful Thanksgiving season, let us each try to put our heart in the right place. Of course, by ourselves we will still focus on the negative. But filtered through our Jesus Connection, the blessings and the evidence of God's plan coming to fruition is very clear. May God's Grace be ever more evident to you and an ever constant sustaining force in your life. Never doubt that our Lord is with you. He even says, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." John 5:17 Prepare your Hearts for His blessings and His coming! What a wonderful season! May Jesus allow

Anticipation

Some of you are no doubt excited to travel for this upcoming Thanksgiving weekend. I know I am certainly excited to see my relatives that are traveling to be with us. Sometimes anticipation is truly half of the enjoyment. My wife must have our vacation planned out 6 months in advance, because she enjoys looking forward to the times of relaxation. In those times when things are getting a little tense, she can say to herself, "just 3 more weeks and I'll be laying on the beach." Even on my whirlwind trip to Midwest City, OK this past weekend, the anticipation of returning home and seeing all my children and friends sustained me. It is this sense of anticipation which helps me understand one aspect to Jesus' words when He tells us to watch expectantly for His second coming. Even though the words were spoken nearly 2000 years ago, they still are relevant for us today. "What I say to you, I say to everyone, 'Watch!'" Mark 13:37 We are to watch with an eagerness of anticipation for the return of Jesus. He will not only take us home to be with Him but our whole family will be there; not just the ones we've known on this earth, but the whole of the Christian clan. Now I personally don't think I'll continue to suffer from my inability to remember names once I am in heaven. I think I'll "recognize everyone." The anticipation of that time is truly worth savoring. The joy of the homecoming that we celebrate this week is only a foretaste of the Thanksgiving Feast to come. May God bless each of you who travel and give you a blessed Thanksgiving Day! Rudy

Bees

I don't know for sure how you feel about bees, but I don't really care for them. Here in Colorado they seem to show up every time the sun comes out. I never got the hang of just standing still and saying they won't bother you. Usually I have to move. Now it would be different if bees didn't have those little stingers in their butts. In fact, it would be a lot different. I once heard a story, I don't know if it's true or not, but it illustrates my point. A Father and son were riding down the road in their old pickup truck when from out of nowhere they realized there was a bee in the cab with them. This was especially scary to these two because they knew that the son had a deathly allergy to the sting of a bee. As the son cowered under his coat the father swatted at the bee. In a few moments the father announced the all clear and the son looked out to see the bee, dead in the father's hand with the stinger deeply embedded in the father's palm. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor 15:55 As you ponder all you have to be thankful for on this Thanksgiving weekend, remember the greatest gift that we have. That Jesus took that stinger out of death. We no longer need to cower at the fear of death. It's power has been taken away; the stinger sunk deeply into our Lord's palm in order to protect us from it's danger. We no longer need to act like we are deathly allergic to death! It has no power over us. What a wonderful gift! What a tremendous blessings to be Thankful for! May God our Father bless your celebration of this Thanksgiving Holiday with true insight into His gifts! Rudy PS I am signing off for the holiday weekend. I'll will write again on Monday. Don't forget about the Christmas tree cutting extravaganza on Saturday. Call me at 460-0404 for more info.

Crossroads

Several people have shared with me lately that they think I am at a Crossroads in my life. I am just finishing up 10 months as the "fill in" Youth Director for our church and the whole of life lies before me. Of course, I must still make a living and I will continue in real estate because that's what I know. But more than ever before I have realized that each one of us are called by God to be His disciples. It is not limited to the clergy or the trained church worker, although they are supposed to equip us for every good work that God calls us to do. But each one of us needs to always be prepared to give an account of the hope that is within us. We each need to be able to tell others about the love of Jesus! It is irrelevant where we make our living. As a matter of fact, those that don't make their living in the church have many more chances to share the Good News of the Gospel with the world, because that is where they are each and every day. So you could say that each day each one of us are sitting at a Crossroad of sorts. For God tells us not to worry about tomorrow but deal with the cares of today. So each day for each of us should be one of excitement, looking forward to what God is going to do with us today. And if we unshackle our minds and allow God's Spirit to lead us, there is no telling where we will end up. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," 1 Corinthians 2:9 Here Paul quotes Isaiah and then tells us that we should look to the Spirit for guidance -- NOT the spirit of this world. So as you begin each day, ask God how He intends to use you and then be listening for the answer. You never know where the day's roads might take you. May His guidance direct your steps, today and always!

Rudy

Noah's Prayer

Each night that we gather as a family for supper we end our time with a round table prayer where everyone from youngest to oldest gets to set their petitions before God. Last night, Noah (my 6 year old) started his prayer this way. "Dear, Lord, please keep me safe and give me money..." I was already preparing the talk I would have with him afterward, but he went on to tell God that he needed money to buy Christmas presents for his family at the little store they have at school. I kind of changed my direction of thought and wondered how often I approach God with as sincere a faith as Noah had at that moment. By my age, most of that pure reliance on God has gone the way of the American work ethic. Luther quotes Psalm 127:2 this way, "It is vain that you rise up early and go to bed late, and eat the bread of sorrow; for so he gives to his beloved in sleep." He then says, "The whole verse is directed against arrogance and anxiety, as if he were to say: It is futile for you to rise up early and go to bed late, and think that the more you labor the more you will have. For that is something that the blessing of God has to accomplish." (1) How hard this lesson is to learn!! To strike that delicate balance of working hard while still trusting in God for all blessings is one tough thing to do. Luther write pages on it, and it is if he is writing about the American society of today. Which I guess just proves that there is nothing new under the sun. Luther again, "At issue is not the matter of work, but only the matter of pernicious worry, covetousness, and unbelief." May the Lord show you His hand in your daily grind! Rudy(1) Luther's Works, Vol 45, pg 332

Shrewd and Innocent

I've been burned and you probably have been burned, too. It's when someone that should know better doesn't follow through on a promise. I bet every one of my children can come up with a time when I have not followed through on a promise that I have made to them. And I really try to promise only those things that I can deliver. But still there are times when I screw up. At the same time there are people in the world who don't even try. They can come up with all kinds of excuses why the original rules don't apply anymore and after all it's not really their fault that they can't follow through on their word. Our reaction may be to become like them. If no one else keeps their word why should I bother? But that is the wrong reaction. Jesus sent His disciples out into tough world. He even said that He was sending them out like sheep among wolves. But He gave them a little piece of advice. "Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." Matthew 10:16 This is, at first glance, kind of hard to understand. But the net effect is that we are to be on our guard, knowing what the world might do to us but doing none of it in return. At some old gas station in some old podunkville, I once saw a sign that said, "In God we trust, all others pay cash." In essence, blind trust should be reserved for God. I have lived my life saying that I would trust everyone the first time, and I have been screwed by a lot of people once. A wiser approach might be to trust everyone all the time but cover your butt. Be wise to what might happen, and take appropriate actions but never become like the problem, no matter how bad it gets. Remember what your momma told you, "Two wrongs don't make a right!" May Jesus walk with you as you step out into the world today!

Rudy

Good Morning

Good Morning from windy Colorado. This day reminds me of one of the early days when I first started writing these devotions. It was windy then, too. I even wrote about how the wind was like the Spirit, coming when it wanted to without any control on our part. I started to write so that I would develop the discipline to write my son, away at college, each day. It amazes me how God has taken that little action and multiplied it many fold. Many of you who receive these little ramblings have become very close to me, even though I haven't even met some of you face to face. I really love just simply doing what God sets before me and watching how He is going to unfold it. It is like a present that God gives back to me, for just showing up! I would ask each one of you just to be faithful to the study of the Word; be sensitive to the urgings of the Spirit; and never be too busy to follow through. I think you, too, will see the blessings that God gives for just being moldable clay in the Master's hands. Jesus says that "wisdom is proved right by her actions." (Matthew 11:19) There are many times you might look stupid doing what the Lord calls you to do. That is because most of the time it takes faith to step out. And stepping out in faith looks stupid to a faithless world. And remember that true wisdom comes from God, not from the world. I am thankful for all of you who have become my friends because I started writing these little devos. It is truly a blessing that I didn't expect and one that I will treasure always. May God be with each one of you today. Rudy

NPR

My wife, Dena, asks me why I listen to National Public Radio (NPR) because sometimes it makes me so mad or sometimes even sad. Yesterday was a sad one. There was this special on the "new spirituality" that is uniquely American. It basically said that people are mixing and matching all different parts of many different religions, including Christianity, into a blend that matches their personality. One person even quoted their spiritual leader by saying something like, "don't be too worried about which school you follow, they all lead to the same place." They called all the different religions "schools" like it was only the difference between going to one college or the next; they each were going to give you a good spiritual education. I know I am going to sound narrow minded, but there are only two religions. The Truth is Jesus Christ is the only name under heaven by which man can be saved. Any other religion that calls on any other name is all part of the same religion; one propagated by Satan to draw us away from the Truth. You see, Satan doesn't care what you believe, as long as it doesn't include the Grace of Jesus Christ. "But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good." Titus 1:15-16 Now the flip side is that Grace is bigger than all outdoors. Just line up with Jesus and it's all yours! Right? May the peace of the one, true God be with you now and forevermore! Rudy

Unseen

Sabrina* and I were talking just the other day about discernment and particularly how one might get a "bad" or a "good" feeling about a place. Since she had never heard of the Old Testament story of Elisha's servant whose eyes were open I thought I would pass it along to you out there in readership land, just in case you, too, might not have heard the story. It is found in 2 Kings 6. You see, Elisha was very connected. It seems that the King of Aram, the bad guy, was trying to get the Israel army and would set traps for them. But Elisha was always informed as to where they would be and would warn the King of Israel not to go where the trap had been set. This infuriated the King of Aram so much that he tried to root out the spy that was telling all of his plans to the enemy. But his men said that this guy Elisha even knew what the King of Aram said in his bedroom. And, of course, Elisha was passing it all on to the good guys. So the bad King found out where Elisha was going to be and surrounded him at night with a mighty army. When Elisha's servant pecked out the window in the morning he about had a cow. Here was this huge army all just to kill two men. The servant was having a little anxiety attack about the whole situation so Elisha filled him in on a little secret. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Now, Elisha's servant must have been thinking that Elisha had finally lost it. But Elisha prayed that the barrier between the seen and unseen worlds would be lifted for this servant and the servant saw the mighty host of God's army that was all around them. What's more, this army had advanced technology. They were able to strike the enemy with blindness. Pretty neat. So Elisha just led the blinded army into captivity, fed them a great banquet and then let them go home. For some reason after that the raids of the Aramean Army stopped. Now to the point. The unseen world is all around us. Elisha was obviously connected and could see this unseen world all the time. But for the rest of us, we might only get a glimpse when God wants us to. Maybe some people have a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows them to be more sensitive to the unseen world. But I like what Elisha said to his servant and it reminds me of a New Testament verse that is similar. "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." 1 John 4:4 There is no time in our life that we need fear the enemy forces. Our God is much greater. If we listen, He will even tell us when they have laid a trap for us. Won't they be frustrated when we stop showing up for their traps? May the God of all knowledge be with you as you walk the path today! Rudy* For those of you who may not know, Sabrina is a 23 year old young lady that has been living with us for 6 months now.

Strongholds

This term has become known as a Spiritual Warfare term. It indicates a geographic region that Satan has concentrated his forces. This kind of ties to our discussion of yesterday about being able to discern a "good" place or a "bad" place. There are Biblical implications that there are such places. We have an example in a place called Gerasenes, talked about in Luke 8:26. This is where Jesus met a man possessed by the demon called Legion. And Legion begged Jesus repeatedly not to order him out of the area. So Jesus sent him into some pigs. Some scholars connect this to a "territorial" demon or one that is anchored to a geographic place. Now I am not willing to turn this into doctrine, but there is some logic that seems to apply. Paul tells us how to handle these types of strongholds in 2 Corinthians 9:3ff. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Once I bought a horse farm south of town. After about six months of pain I resold it to some German investors. I was sure at the end of those six months that God had place me there just to break the hold of a demonic stronghold. I believe that I was at least partially successful. I think each one of us needs to have our antennas up and really try to discern the time and place for prayer. And also the wisdom of where to walk and where to go in only when you are heavily armed with spiritual weapons. May the Lord guide your thoughts and lives, both today and forevermore! Rudy

Mutual

"...that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Romans 1:12 You know what I have figured out? Everyone hurts. At times even the strongest person needs someone to lean on. It is because of this nasty thing we call sin. It invades each day like a filth that discolors our vision. At some point in time, I suppose, that we might actually reach the point where we can lean on God directly. But there are still days I need a "Jesus with skin on" and many times that comes in form of my Christian brothers and sisters. Maybe someday I will reach that level of maturity in my faith where it's just me and God, but I think if I get there I might actually be pretty close to heaven. Meanwhile..., back here in this vale of tears I think it is OK to reach out for a strong shoulder when you need to. The sad part of it is that almost every time it's our own doing that ends us up in the pits. At least for myself, if I was truly honest with myself, I would admit that I can't really blame anyone else. That's actually when it's the hardest to go to someone and ask for their shoulder. So when you are offering a shoulder I think it is wise not to try to "fix" the situation, at least not right away. The skin might be too tender. Just listen and pray. You just might become the island of calm in the middle of a troubled sea for someone. And all of us end up in that particular boat now and then. Each of us need to practice for that day when Jesus is truly our only hope and comfort that we need. Till then, "lean on me." May the God of our comfort be real to you today! Rudy

Vocalizing

Last night I got to sing an advent hymn. No big deal, right? Well, to me it was a big deal and I am going to tell you why. For years I have been having problems with my voice. I was gradually losing my range of notes and it was hurting to sing. I even got to where I sounded like I was going through puberty again. Last year at Christmas it got so bad that I was unable to sing even the simplest of Christmas songs. That's when I finally decided to go to the doctor. After running an entire television studio down my nose, he announced I had "vocal nodules" and then he said the reason for these things was vocal abuse. So I tried all his remedies with really no progress. Finally in the middle of the summer I was fed up with the whole thing and decided it was finally time to start praying about it. It was so good to sing with the rest of the congregation last night that I maybe caught just a little glimpse of what it will be like to praise God in the heavenly choir. I am going to keep praying for God to continue the healing process that He has started on my voice. And maybe in the future, I won't be so slow to go to the Great Physician and put some trust there. Psalm 150 says it pretty well: "Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and the lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and the flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." And I will joyfully praise Him with my voice! May He grant you the joy of worship this Christmas season! Rudy

Praise God

"The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, the law forbids you to carry your mat." Matthew 5:9-10 Legalism kills. Not only does it kill us if we decide to live by the law, but it kills a church body or a family or anything else it come into contact with. Jesus had just healed a man who could not walk and instead of praising God for a miracle before their very eyes, the Jews got all hung up over the guy carrying his mat. I am sure there are times in your life that you can recall missing the whole point of what God was trying to get across to you simply because you were hung up on the rules. Take for example the time my Father-in-law, a Lutheran Minister, walked into a Lutheran church and was not able to go to Holy Communion, simply because they wanted to control who communed. Legalism is nothing more than the party in power wanting to control everyone around. You see Grace is not a control thing. It is free and freeing! It is up to each individual to not use the freedom of Grace as a license to sin. Our life becomes our response to the freedom that God has given us in the gospel. Praise God!!! Every other religion on the face of this earth controls through legalism. I am so glad that my God controls through Grace. I am so glad that he loves me into submission. May the arms of Grace enfold you today as you walk this land. Rudy

Roots

"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble and persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." Matthew 13:20-21 How often are we guilty of the "good times trust syndrome?" As long as the blessings are flowing down from God we will bless Him with our trust. But boy, if there is one hiccup, we are just all over God for His lack of attention to our situation. Roots are what we need. That means we are able to look back on our life and see with the 20/20 of hindsight how God has taken care of us in every situation; even the tough ones, which when we were in the middle of, we thought that there was no hope. That memory is the roots that set us apart from the baby Christian. We also have corporate roots. Those come from the Bible. We can look back on all the memories accumulated there and with the focused storytelling can see that God is in charge. Every time -- no matter what. We can proclaim with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." (13:15) For really, what earthly gift compares with the eternal gift of everlasting life? And we have the promise of the Almighty Creator of the Universe that nothing can snatch us out of His hand. So when we are beset by temporary earthly problems, especially when they are money related, look to our roots. The memory of how God has always carried us through will sustain us through each and every "pain in the butt" earthly trial. May the Lord Bless and keep you, especially in the tough times! Rudy

Left Behind

No I am not going to talk about the popular fiction book series. Instead I am going to talk about the healing of the Gadarene demoniac. Just a couple of days ago I wrote about "Strongholds" and the healing of this man who had "Legion" of demons inside him. As we were talking about this guy last night at my accountability group, Scott brought up that this former demon possessed man became a great missionary. So I began to look for the story. First, right after the healing, the man asks Jesus to able to go with Him in the boat. Jesus says no and leaves him behind to "go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19) I do think the man did just what Jesus told him to, because we see Jesus entering the same area in Mark 7 and 8. Earlier the people in the region had begged Him to leave. Now, they are bringing there sick to him to be healed and a large crowd gathers and Jesus feeds them. Over four thousand men alone, not counting women and children. The healed demoniac had a powerful testimony. Jesus knew that he would be a better witness to Him in his home area than if he came along with Jesus. Sometimes I think we get upset that Jesus wants us to stay behind in our hometown to do missionary work. It would be much more exciting to go to Nepal or Africa and really do the work of God. But instead we are called to this same old boring place. And the same old boring workplace with the same old (boring?) people and there we have to be the witness to the people about the mighty things that God has done in our life. At least if we could go somewhere where people don't know us, we might be able to make our story exciting by embellishing a few details. But instead we are called to talk with people we have known all our lives. This, of course, is where we have to be faithful to our Lord and let Him provide the opportunities and the words. We just need to be the faithful servant who shows up to do the Lord's work. We will let Him provide the increase. To the One who calls and places us, be all glory and honor now and forever! Amen! Rudy

Song of Praise

Let my soul praise the Lord, Let my soul, from its deepest depths, praise the Lord. I see the early morning sunrise, and it reminds me that He makes all things new. I see the stars twinkle in the night, and it reminds me of all my Christian brothers and sisters. The fullness and the beauty of this awesome land are but a glimpse of the Creator's Glory. The stars are but an indicator of the faithful remnant that He has preserved in this land. Let my soul praise the Lord! I know full well that all my gifts are from Him. He has blessed me beyond measure, but yet I cry out for more. Cannot my belly be satisfied? Surely, it is not my god. Self control must come from You, Oh God. Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come. Let my soul praise you, Oh mighty Lord! My rest for stress must be found in You, Oh Lord. The pain in my head is like the pain of sin. You alone are the cure. But yet the pain that you endured, I will never feel. Your Grace is beyond all measure. Surely it is more boundless than even the night sky. Let my soul praise you, Oh Lord. From its deepest depths, let my soul praise You! Of Rudy

Random Thoughts

Every gift has a cost, except one. Because God has forgiven us, we can forgive others. If all is "chasing after the wind" and that is meaningless, what is meaningful? (1) If "what is twisted cannot be straightened" is true, how are we a "new creation?" (2) Do we really want wisdom if it only brings much sorrow? (3) "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God." Ecc 2:24 Paul said, "for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Now I certainly do not think Paul was a simple man. But he had learned the place for wisdom and the place for simplicity. Sometimes the most complex situation is only complex because we, in our stupidity, are trying to make it complex. We all choose our own particular "chasing after the wind" to occupy our time. Why? I suppose because we like to eat; and it's not polite to stay with your parents all your life. But how is that meaningful? Solomon certainly didn't find meaning in as full a life as any man could dream of. I believe that the only way that we can ever have eternal significance with our lives is to align ourselves with the only thing that had eternal significance in this world. The life and times of Jesus Christ. The answer to the most complex question is in the simple life of a Jewish carpenter. Because He is the only One that ever did anything that wasn't "chasing after the wind." So whatever breeze we are following we must preach Christ crucified. We must live as a witness to the hope that is within us. To do anything else with our lives, whatever our profession, would be to trash these precious moments we call life. May God bless you and keep you both today and forever! Rudy (1) Ecc 1:14 (2) Ecc 1:15 (3) Ecc 1:18

How do you feel?

"How do you feel?" For those of you who do not have all of the Star Trek movies memorized, this is a line from Star Trek 4, "The Journey Home" where the computer asks Spock how he feels. After all, explains Spock's mother, he is half human and the computer knows he has feelings. Most of us are a little more than half human and have these feelings to deal with. For many reasons lately I have been contemplating feelings. Our emotions are powerful motivators. Love can drive us to extreme and often unjustifiable behavior; but so can anger. Passion can drive us to do great things for God or it can lead an unsuspecting group down the road of cult behavior. So sometimes I think our society tends to blend us towards the middle. It tells us, "don't ruffle feathers and you'll be just fine." But in our reunion group Bible study yesterday, Scott showed us the verses in Revelation written to the church at Laodicea. "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." Rev 3:15-16 Scott explained to us that upstream from the town of Laodicea there were two streams, one cool and refreshing, the other flowing from a thermal hot springs that was a relaxing first century spa. Both the hot and the cold were useful to people. But, by the time they got to Laodicea they mixed and became lukewarm, which was useful to no one. It would seem to me that God is not happy with lukewarm mediocrity. He wants us either hot or cold, using whatever gifts he has given us to serve His people. Yes, emotion can produce extremes that are undesirable, but with God as our pilot and friends as our accountability group, passion can and should play a role in our lives. So, "How do you feel?" Hot, cold or just lukewarm? May the Lord give you a passion to use your gifts for Him! Rudy

Cold Air Plug

Hi there, it's me. And I hope each one of you had a blessed Christmas and wonderful New Year. Mine was wonderful!, Thanks. Some of you know that I live in the mountains and we provide some of our heat by wood stove. When you are lighting a fire after a really cold night, one might experience a cold air plug in the chimney. My very first experience with a cold air plug happened to me in a lodge in Steamboat Springs on a college class over Christmas break a lot of years ago. Since I didn't know what was up with this cold air plug, I filled the whole lodge with smoke before someone explained that I not only had to check if the damper was open, but I also had to shove a lit newspaper up the chimney to get the air flowing in the right direction. We are given a picture image in Revelation 5:8 of the prayers of the saints. "Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." We are given this image of the pleasing aroma of our prayers rising to God and filling the place before the throne. I personally would like my prayers to be among the fragrant aroma before God's throne. But prayer is a discipline on our part. And sometimes there might be a "cold air plug" blocking the fragrant smoke of our prayers from getting to God. Over the next few days I am going to write about the discipline of prayer. As these days unfold why don't you contemplate the "cold air plugs" that might be getting in the way of your prayers. Of course, I will be giving all the glory to God for His intercession for us, but I will also look at the level of discipline we need when we approach the awesome throne of the Lord of the Universe. May the God of all blessing continue to shower you with His fruits. Rudy

In Season and out of Season

I am going to talk about prayer, but let's start with a little detour first. Paul writes to the young preacher Timothy: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season...For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (2 Tim 4:2-4) I don't know how many times this has been the way of society in the past, but I know we are living it now. You can even custom fit your religion to include parts of this and parts of that, just to suit your own desires. Then you can find a "spiritual guide" to help you along the path. The sad thing is that all of these other philosophies find their way into the Christian's world. Our only defense is sound discipline. Now I know the "D" word (discipline) is not one that our society or we like to hear. But it is essential for us to have it so that our way is not diluted by Satan and all his offerings. I have made the choice a long time ago that I pray in the morning. Now, each morning I don't reevaluate that choice. I just do it. We pray because God has commanded us to pray. It is more important than our food or exercise. It is more important than our car and its oil change. Among other things, it is our very connection with our Savior. "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Th 5:16-18 We pray even when we do not "feel" like praying. Because we have been told to pray. That alone is a good enough reason. But we have many more. Tomorrow we will talk about how Prayer changes things. May the Lord keep you safe as you venture into this unbelieving world with His Good News! Rudy

Prayer changes things

I have had the discussion at least 50 times in my life. It goes something like this. Them: "The real benefit of prayer is it changes us." Me: "But, prayer can also change things, you know really alter the course of events." Them: "No, It just alters the way we view the situation, nothing else really changes." I cannot and I will not give in on this topic. Sure, I agree 100% that there are times when prayer alters our perception of a situation. But, prayer also has the power to change the world! It can make a sick person whole; it can soften an unbeliever's heart; it can provide food for one's next meal; and it can change the action of God. In Ezekiel 22:30 God does not want to destroy the land but He could find no one that would intercede for the land in prayer, to "stand in the gap." Since He could find no one to pray, He destroyed the land. Could God not have destroyed the land? Of course. But He has chosen to work this way and He is a just God. "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16 God tells us that our prayers, seen through the righteousness of Jesus are powerful and effective. What more could we want? In Joshua 10 we are told how God responded to Joshua prayer and had the sun stand still for a day! That prayer certainly changed things! So whether the results are inside us or out in the world prayer is a worthwhile discipline to have. Tomorrow an acronym. May the Peace of our newborn Savior King rest on you today! Rudy

How to Pray

"Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1 Like the disciples, we are also eager for God to teach us how we are to come to Him in prayer. And the Lord's prayer should be included at some time during our daily prayers. We put it at the end of our round table prayer after supper. Martin Luther used the Lord's prayer as the structure for his daily prayer as well as praying it in German, Latin and I think Greek. Another common guide for daily prayers is the acronym ACTS. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. That's not a bad one to follow, although I have found that I need to get my confession out of the way in the first part of my prayer. Then I feel that the rest goes better. In fact, I've come up with my own little acronym. The problem is that I have never been very good with these types of little word games. But, I decided I would share this one with you just in case it helped anyone else think through their daily prayer discipline. My acronym is I PREPARE. Stay with me now. The I stands for Invocation; I always start in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The P stands for Pronounce; which is where I simply state my belief that our God is the Lord and Creator of all. Then comes Repentance. This I think I need to get out of the way early in the prayer so any barriers between God and me don't hinder the rest of the prayer. This next one is the one that doesn't quite fit in the acronym. I prEsent myself as a living sacrifice for the work that God has set before for this day. Then I Praise God. For some reason I always end up smiling in this part of my prayer. Then I Ask for His Spirit to fill me up. Then I Request protection. I ask for God's guardian angels to surround my family and love ones and name them each by name. Lastly, I Entreat God. This is where I set forth the petitions for the days concerns. Invocation Pronounce Repentance prEsent myself as a living sacrifice Praise Ask for His Spirit Request protection Entreat May God develop in you a wonderful desire to talk with Him each day!

Rudy

Anxious

There is this little personality trait called anxiousness that some people have in abundance and some have only slightly, but I believe we all have it. For this little malady there is a cure. Not just a treatment-a cure! But as with so many other things that God is willing to help us with, we too often know the cure intellectually and are willing to give it a try, but when God actually delivers on His end, we say, "Oh, no, Lord, I don't really feel right without my anxiousness," and we reach out and take it right back from Him. So ask yourself, "Self, do you really want to feel all this anxiousness?" If the answer is no, not really, then maybe you out to take the cure. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, presents your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil 4:6&7 We all do this little game of reaching out and taking back all our cares and trying to carry them ourselves. But I sincerely believe that it is not what God wants for us. After all, if we are freed from our burdens by Jesus, then we are more apt to be able to share in someone else's sorrows and direct them to the same peace that passes all understanding that we have. But if we are too busy wallowing in our own anxiety, we most likely won't even notice when our friend needs our shoulder to lean on. So next time you ask God for His help, let Him help! And don't try to take it back. May God grant you that Peace that only He can give! Rudy

Struggle with Grace

We were talking in the Young Adult class on Sunday about the differences in denominations. I know it is an oversimplification, but I believe, at the core, the majority of differences between church bodies can be tied to individual struggles with the concept of Grace. I, myself, wish that I could have that clear bolt of insight that it is said Luther had when he first understood the message of Grace as presented in Romans. I continue to struggle with how our life should be a response to Grace instead of a feeble attempt to live a good life. I think that every attempt to lead a "good life" will fail. And when that failure comes, the guilt that is human will threaten to overwhelm us. That is when we are at our most vulnerable point, and Satan might get a foothold into our existence. The whole prosperity theology which says we will reap the rewards of the good we do, again, is a theology that misplaces Grace. How in the world can sinful man earn favor in God's eyes based on his own actions? I must wholly lean on Christ and the Grace offered in the cross of His suffering. That alone is the source of my blessing. This is why God sometimes has to give us lessons like Paul and Paul's own healing of his thorn in the flesh. God's answer was that Grace alone was sufficient for Paul. When we hear that answer to our prayers; That God's Grace alone is sufficient for our struggles; sometimes it is a hard concept to gain comfort from. We want to do something instead of resting securely in the arms of Grace, allowing God's will to unfold. But God has given us the secret to overcoming that fear and trusting in Him alone. It comes from our sonship with Him. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him, we cry, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15. May you rest assured of God's Grace and cling to Him alone. Rudy

Again?

OK, judging by some of the reaction I received from yesterday's devo, I don't think I was too clear in getting my point across. But as I am sitting here thinking about words, I think I might make the same mistake again. But I will try one more time. Whenever we think we are good enough to earn something from God, lookout. Now I don't want to get too down on humankind, but think of a snail. Say you are digging in your garden on a nice spring day and you come across this slug. Nothing but slimey. Your first response is probably not to watch it and see if it does anything good to earn your favor. The slug will live or die based on your actions. And you will only save it because you want it to live, not because it will do anything for you to gain your favor. To God, I imagine we look very slimey. One day we promise Him all our devotion, but screw up fifty times before that day has gone by. The only chance we have is that the Almighty Creator of the Universe reaches into our pitiful existence and pulls us up out of the slime. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8 Now here's the rub. Sin still lives in our bodies. Can we participate in God's good plan? Only through His good Grace! The second we try to earn it, whatever it is; salvation or blessing, we fall back under the law which will only serve to condemn us. Salvation or God's blessing or His daily presence only comes through His Grace. Even His Spiritual gifts come through His Grace - not our merit. The good news is that God created us in His image so we probably don't look like slugs to Him. But without His Grace we would be slime nonetheless. I pray that His Grace would be evident to you in a real way today. Rudy

Self Worth

My youngest, Naomi, turned four just a few days ago, and her birthday was a wonderful occasion. One of her presents were little ballet slippers, because she really enjoys watching her older sister practicing her ballet and many times try to emulate her. After our party at supper, the two sisters went off to their room to practice their ballet together. Several hours later the two emerged for a performance. For about a minute, little Naomi, following the direction of her coach, performed a ballet for the whole family that was very precious. Obviously, Naomi was pleased with her performance and our response. Her beaming smile showed that we had boosted her self worth by our applause and cheers. How often are we just like my little Naomi, taking our self worth from the reaction of others; or from how well we perform at our job; or how good of a show we put on? And I do believe that it is good to take pride in our accomplishments, especially if we are thanking God for those abilities. However, if that is the only source of our self worth, someday we will be disappointed. Someday we will flub it in front of an important person and our self worth will go through the floor. Just in preparation for that day I would like to let you in on a little secret. Our true self worth is built on the fact that God thought we were worth something. In fact, He was willing to pay a handsome price. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." 1 Peter 1:18-19 For that reason alone our self worth should be unassailable. May the Love that Jesus felt for you as He shed His blood for you be real in your life today! Rudy

Poor In Spirit?

Jesus starts out His talk with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3 Now folks, I must admit I would like to ask Jesus just exactly what He meant. Luther tried to explain it with 7 1/2 pages of text; just this one verse! Among other things, Luther says it was a dramatic attention getter that was diametrically opposed to the teaching of the day. The teaching of the day supposedly was very much like the prosperity teachings of today. You were blessed in this world if God loved you. And if you were poor or afflicted it was a sign of God's wrath on you. Into this climate Jesus says, 'If you are spiritually poor, I bless you with the kingdom of heaven.' I guess that would get people's attention. I would hope that if I was listening to Jesus preach that sermon, I would have been among those who desperately wanted His words to be the Truth. But what if I had been a Pharisee, would I have listened or would I have called Jesus crazy? By the Grace of God, I was born much later and to a mother who risked a lot just to have me baptized. I never had to wonder if the Words of Jesus were Truth. I have known and believed them all my life. But I still cling to a verse, spoken by Jesus 2000 years ago that says I don't have to be perfect or blessed in this world in order to get into heaven. All I have to do is build my house on the rock of Jesus and my loving Savior takes care of the rest. So whether you are rich or poor; sick or healthy; on the top of society or at the bottom; Jesus is the Savior for you. He is our all in all! May He bless you and keep you now and forevermore! Rudy

Shine

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14 My lovely wife, Dena and I have been blessed with seven wonderful children. That means seven pregnancies. There is something different about a pregnant woman. My father says they "glow." Especially in the later months it is very difficult not to notice that a woman is pregnant. One other thing about this analogy; you can't be just a little bit pregnant; either you are or you are not. Many things about our Christian walk are similar. Jesus says that we are the light of the world. Then His very next sentence is that you cannot hide a city on a hill. Is your Christianity as obvious as a woman who is nine months pregnant? Does your faith glow to give light to all those around you? I have to honestly answer those questions for myself in the negative. As a matter of fact, there are times when my bad mood precedes me into a room; when I know just by walking into a crowd I can change their mood. It is as if there is a bubble that is around each one of us that, when it comes in contact with others it shares our mood and our motivators. Some people's bubbles are bigger than others, but we all have them. When you are a Christian, it should be evident to all those around you. Because, the light of Christ is shining through you. The purpose of this devo is not to elicit guilt, because we all fall short and wholly lean on God's Grace. Rather it is to serve as a reminder and a motivator to SHINE. "Make them wonder what you've got." Remember, just like you can't be a little bit pregnant, you also can't be just a little bit Christian! May the Light of the world shine through you!

Rudy

Why we do what we do.

In two separate Bible studies for two different age groups, the same question has recently come up. Was Rahab wrong in lying to save the spies? (Joshua 2-6) I personally, being a black and white kind of guy don't like to say that there might be situational ethics. It is clear, based on the law that lying is wrong. "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another." Leviticus 19:11 But my question to my groups over the last several days has become, "What motivates us to want to not sin?" I have been getting answers like, "To please God," or "To obey the law." I would propose to you that these are the wrong answers. While the motivation behind these answers is good, I don't think we can do either. We can't please God without the blood of Jesus, and we can never obey the law perfectly. And if we live by the law we will most assuredly die by the law. But we can respond to Grace. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -- yet not I, but the grace of God that was in me." 1 Co 15:10 And, "We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19 It is only through the Grace of God that we can even desire not to sin. It is only through God's love that we can begin to see the fulfillment of the law. "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Romans 13:10 By responding to God's grace to us in love towards our neighbor, we can begin to understand the basis for the law. And we can desire to keep the law as a response to the Grace that God has first given us. So, might there ever be a situation where I was motivated to lie out of love for my neighbor? I don't know. If it happens, I'll be sure to report in. May the Love of Jesus be your guide! Rudy

Fugitives

I have just heard that the last two of the "Texas seven" have given up peacefully. So after I let my dog out this morning, I didn't re-lock the door. In case you don't know what I am talking about, there were seven fugitives that have been holding up since the first of the year in a trailer park just a couple of miles from our house. Once they apprehended five of them, the story was all over the news about the two that were still on the loose. Our schools went into "lockdown" mode, and many of us locked our doors. In fact, all who visit us know that we leave our front door unlocked on purpose because of the strange times our visitors usually show up. But not the last two days. I even had to knock to get in last night, since I don't own a key to my house. Scripture even tells us to be wary of strangers. "Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position." 2 Peter 3:11 But it is not our physical bodies that this warning applies to; it is our spiritual well being. How many of us lock the doors to our hearts and minds when lawlessness comes knocking? And even if we lock our front door, this kind of lawlessness would rather come in through the TV anyway. If there was a news report about indecency and immorality being on the loose, how many of us would lock our hearts securely away from it? My guess is it might rather turn out to be a real draw, with people opening up to view all the nasty details. That's the kind of world we live in. But that doesn't mean we, as Christians, have to go along with it, now does it? Guard your hearts and your minds! What is at stake is much greater than just your earthly life! May the Lord of All send His protection to guard your heart! Rudy

Cold from the bench

We attended Zachary's mid winter Basketball Homecoming Game last night. Zachary is my 18 year old senior, so this was an important game. He's been doing really well in practice, so we thought he might see some game time. The first half our team was not doing very well. Most of our good players were off, making dumb mistakes. Right before half, Zachary went in. Of course, I was watching Zachary. He was moving good even though he had just been sitting getting cold on the bench for the first half of the game. The ball moved down court and into his hands. He moved it quickly, just like he was supposed to do. One of the other team's guys stole it, just like they had been doing to all our guys, and scored. The coach call a time out and Zachary was out. He had maybe played 30 seconds. I was ticked, but his Mom was really ticked. It just didn't seem fair. Zachary spent the rest of the game on the bench. How many times do we as Christians feel like we are sitting on the bench? We might feel like God hasn't called us into the battle and all our training is going to waste. We might also feel that we are growing cold on the inactive bench. It is still our duty to stay sharp, ready to respond to God's call for action the second it comes. We may only have a 30 second window in which to put all our training into play. But there is one difference in this analogy between Zachary's coach and Our God. Our God knows what Grace is and uses it freely. No matter how many times we screw up, there will still be more opportunities to serve our God. So stand firm and be ready for action, even if sometimes you maybe growing a tad cold on the bench. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph 2:10 Praise God for Grace! May it be real to you today! Rudy

Living Water

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'" John 4:15 At this point the woman at the well didn't know that Jesus was offering her eternal life. She just thought He had some magic that would let her not have to come to the well each day. Now days, through God's gift of technology, we have that gift of water springing forth inside our houses so that we don't have to go to the well. Last night my 'magic technology' failed and the tap quit springing forth. So I had to go to the well of Safeway and purchase bottled water to get us through the night. This little setback in technology made me ponder the woman at the well. Her desire was that Jesus make this life more comfortable for her. In the process she looked right passed the gift of eternal life that Jesus was offering her. How often does this world react in the same way to Jesus? How often do we react in the same way to Jesus? As long as the creature comforts are secure, we are happy with God. But the second there is a blip or a hiccup, we're all over God for not loving us enough to take care of us. How short sighted both the woman at the well was and we can be! This isn't our home. Unfortunately, the more comfortable it is the more apt we are to forget that we are part of a heavenly kingdom. The living water that Jesus offers us is much more valuable than food, clothes, or water springing from our kitchen faucet. So the next time there's a blip in your creature comforts, use it as a reminder of where your true home is. May the Lord keep you secure and continue to bless you in this world! Rudy

Guiding and Provision

It is becoming obvious to me, with some element of age on my side, that "Where God guides, God Provides." It is very easy for us to look at Scripture and say, 'Sure, God helped those guys, but that doesn't apply to me.' But, I think that if we could look at our lives as if written from the 20/20 perspective of hindsight at the end of our lives; with our whole lives condensed into several chapters that included just the highlights from God's viewpoint, we would see that God also guides and provides in our lives just the same as He did in Biblical history. That's why, at age 20, many people struggle with God's Plan for their lives. But if you quiz a group of 40-50 year olds, they can give you multiple examples where God has been present in their lives. That's why He gives us Scripture. So that we might accept by faith now the things that will be fully known by the time we get to heaven. A great example of this is Jeremiah, when the prophet complains about being too young, God tells him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (1:5) And then shows Jeremiah how He (God) would equip him. "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put words in your mouth." (1:9) God was guiding Jeremiah to be a prophet and God gave him the necessary gifts to do the job. One of my main struggles with this whole concept over my life has been God's timing. This is where I have had to learn to accept God's timing as perfect and believe His promise to us also included in the book of Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (29:11) So when the logic or the insight is lacking, put the faith in gear and know that God keeps His promises! May our Lord guide and provide for you today! Rudy

The battle is the Lord's

"The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord." Proverbs 21:31 At first, this Proverb seems to say that the result of the battle is out of our hands. And I do believe that is the major point. The battle does belong to the Lord and the outcome is in His hands. However, there is more wisdom to be gained from this verse. Even though the victory is in the Lord's hands, we are still responsible for getting the horse ready for battle. I haven't been around too many people training a horse for battle, but I have been associated with people training horses for horse shows. This does not just include the right tack on the horse and making it look pretty, that comes at the end. What precedes this pretty part are hours and days, sometimes even month and years, of training the horse; of horse and rider becoming one, where every squeeze of the knee means something very exact, and both rider and horse know it. For us the battle is an ongoing kind of day in and day out war against the forces of evil in this present darkness. We are constantly training recruits to help us, and replace us on the field of battle. But sometimes, I think we neither recognize the battle nor think that the training is important. Both are lies of the enemy. The battle for the hearts and souls of unbelievers is very real. And our need for training is just as real. Can you imagine what would happen if I took one of my horses that I hadn't ridden for years, jumped on it at the National Western Stock Show and tried to win the trophy? I would probably be lucky just to live through it. God expects us to do our part in preparing for the battle. He expects us to equip and to train both ourselves and the new recruits. Whatever your walk in life, you are still part of the Lord's army. Until the victor's rest is won, we need to remember our post in the battle. May the Lord direct your battle preparations! Rudy

Be Prepared

Several years back I had a chance to be on the CNN Show 'Talk Back Live.' It was when we were in Atlanta for the National Youth Gathering and we had signed up weeks earlier to get a seat. That morning we found out that the discussion was going to be on abortion. I thought, Wow, what an opportunity for our whole youth group to fill the seats of this national show. But all the pressures of being the sponsor for these kids piled up that day and I found myself sitting in the chair at 3 in the afternoon, without have having lunch or even my noontime mountain dew! Now that time of the afternoon is my nap time anyway and having skipped lunch seemed to turn my mental capacities to mush. There were so many cobwebs in my brain that when it was my time to talk they must have thought I was a moron. Needless to say, I didn't get a second chance to share my views. They had figured out that I was an inarticulate conservative, and there was no way I was getting air time. I am old enough to know better. I knew that if I skipped lunch and ran nonstop all morning I would not "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 4:15) I knew that I would not "be prepared in season and out of season." (2 Tim 4:2) Even knowing it, I still put myself in the situation. I let the cares of the day get in the way of the one really important thing that I knew I was scheduled for. I wasn't tough enough to do the job God had set before me. There is a definite link between the physical body and the spiritual self. If you let either get out of shape, you cannot be prepared to do the job that God has set before you when it comes time to do it. I Praise God that he is a God that allows second chances! If He gives me more chances, I plan to be prepared. May Our Lord and Savior condition you for the battle! Rudy

Team Work

Lately I have been dismayed, because I have seen individuals struggling for control. Of course, we have had struggles in the political realm and probably right along side that in the spiritual realm. But the struggles I am talking about are in the church realm. These struggles most likely have always been there, I've just missed them. Lately I have been taking notice and they sadden me. Every divisive issue that we spend time on in the church just takes us away from spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am of the opinion, that once a decision is made, even if "your side" didn't "win" you should put it behind you and get on board; giving your whole support to the victor, even if you didn't agree with the direction. I think that is what this verse in Ephesians is telling us: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (5:21) Short of true doctrinal issues, there should be nothing that can divide the church. And I just know that Satan laughs when we fight about the color of the carpet or the direction we should grow or how we should spend money. I know this isn't deep theology, but maybe that's why Satan wins so many battles on this front. When it comes to our doctrine, we are very sure to keep it pure. But when it comes to this little thing called working on a team together, we are willing to "go to the mattresses" over the silliest things. It is a control issue. So the sooner we learn that God is in control -- the better. Submit to God. Submit to one another. Walk and work as a team -- and really tick Satan off! May the Peace of our unifying Lord be with you all! Rudy

Selfish Goat

For those of you who may not remember, I have an old Billy goat named Jordie. He shares quarters with this huge, but very fluffy, sheep. Each morning they get their little helping of grain. When I put just one pile of grain in their pen, Jordie monopolizes it. He uses his curled horns to push the much bigger Licorice out of the way. No matter how many times I yell at him or push him over he still will not share with his stable mate. There are people out there that would like us to think that we, the human race, are only animals; just evolved slightly differently. They can then say that it is just following our instinct to cut someone off in traffic or even force them off the road. Or since we are just animals, we shouldn't expect our children to wait until they are married for sex. After all, they are just following their animal instincts; they can't help themselves. This is where it makes just a little bit of difference what you believe. It is obvious to me that people have the ability to share. They also have the capacity for kindness and self-control. And the capability for all this comes because we were made in the image of our Creator. And He has demonstrated His ability to share the greatest gift ever. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 So when you hear this line, 'It's just human nature, don't fight it,' -- Don't believe it! Because of the gift of our Creator, we are able to rise above the animal world. We are able to experience love and pity and compassion. We are able to share those gifts with a lost and dying world. We are able to love them into a relationship with our very personal Savior. May God bless your day! Rudy

Interdependence

My number 3 son, Aaron Matthew Bauer, is a junior in high School. Recently he was given an assignment in American History to rewrite the Declaration of Independence, declaring his own independence from something. He let me read what he had written last night, and with his permission I share it with you now. The Declaration of Interdependence I hold this truth to be self-evident, that all humanity has been created; therefore, I cannot hold any right to be my own. All rights endowed by my creator, among these are life, liberty, and my personal happiness, are but mere privileges, which I will not hesitate to surrender at a moments notice, if need be. God has come among us and sacrificed himself for our sake. He will never give me cause to alter or abolish my relationship with him; He has, however, given me the free will to do so if I so please. I, along with all others, have sinned, and, therefore, fallen short of the glory of God. There is no hope in my human frailty to reach the perfection He desires for me. I have done the evil I should not; and I have not done the good expected of me. I have sided with the enemy, on many accounts: by putting myself before others, by breaking the commandments I am expected to keep, by judging others, by trespassing upon the rights of others, by being a slave to sin, and by such many more the brevity of this letter does not permit me to fully explain. So I am baptized and buried into perpetual death and damnation by my own actions. I have fully given myself to the fires and torment of hell, but in every stage of my imperfection God has bathed me in his grace and clothed me in his righteousness. The Prince of darkness, tyrant of this world, deserves to possess my soul for eternity. But as death came to the world through Adam, so life has come and redeemed me in the blood of Jesus Christ. I have been rescued from the infinite abyss, and given me the utmost joy, liberty from this present darkness, and life through him. My independence from self-dependence I now officially and forever more declare. The interdependence of mine with the divine creator, and mutual pledge to him my life, fortune, and devotion shall never end with God as my strength. I wish I could have written something like that in High School. May it bless you in the same way it blessed me. May our Sovereign Creator declare His interdependence with you today! Rudy

Compassionate

Last year, I wrote often about Noah, my head strong young son who is now six. He has really come a long way in his ability to control himself, and is doing well at learning all he needs to know for life in his kindergarten class. But he still has his moments. When he does, many people are surprised at how I handle the situation. It's good he is my sixth kid. If he had been my first, I am not sure either of us would have lived through the situation. But being older and a little more patient, I have learned how much value there is in a little compassion. Noah still gets his share of direct discipline, but many times I will give him a little time to "recant" before I lower the boom. It is this period of compassion that many people question. Jonah did the same thing to God when God spared the people of Nineveh. Jonah wanted them punished and he felt that he would rather die than see them go scott free. "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, 'O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'" Jonah 4:1ff I am really glad that God is the one who gets the job of handing out compassion and not Jonah! But aren't we just as bad as Jonah? After God has given us mercy in sending His Son, shouldn't we be merciful in the way we deal with others? Are there times when you would rather die than to show someone mercy and compassion? God calls us to emulate Him and not follow after the patterns of the way the world deals with people. He calls us to be compassionate, even when our sinful nature calls out for justice. Think about it -- is there someone that needs your compassion today? May God bless you with His supernatural compassion today and always! Rudy

Let's make a deal

Twenty years ago I had a discussion regarding pornography with a top guy in a Christian Ministry. I was young and he was older and wiser. But here was his advice: "Son, we must keep abreast of society." Not only was it a bad pun it was also bad advice. Today's technology makes access to absolutely filthy stuff as easy as a click of a mouse. I don't believe there is any way that one can shield their children from the perversity of this society. So we need to educate them, and ourselves, not by keeping abreast of society!, but by making a deal with ourselves to "hide our eyes." The simple solution is not to look. Well, maybe that's not so simple. All around us today our images that could turn our thoughts to lust. The deal we must make is to not look lustfully. Job, remember him, he was the good guy that had several bad days in a row. Anyway, this was his deal with himself. "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." Job 31:1 Remember, it's not what goes into a man that makes him unclean (Mat 15), it is what comes out of his mind and heart. We need to make that same deal with our eyes; that lust won't be a byproduct of our looking. And no that doesn't mean you can look as long as you don't lust. There are some things you just should never look at. Those images will be seared upon your brain for your whole life. I believe this whole area is a doorway that Satan has used extremely well in our society. He has taken our freedom of the press and distorted a good thing into the ruin of many people. This is one area where God calls us to be as wise as serpents but as innocent as doves. May the Lord bless and give you strength for living in this world! Rudy

Cold Front

Most of the time in Colorado, a warm front precedes the cold front. That's what happened yesterday. It was a beautiful 54 degrees with warm sun and crisp clear mountains. Most people new that it was supposed to snow today, but it was hard to except it's coming. Even last night as I went out to feed the horses, the full moon was bright and the sky was clear. But, at about 1am this morning I looked out the window to see that the promised cold front had arrived. It was foggy and windy. Just before I had started to write this morning, it had started to snow. Now I know intellectually that the full moon is still shining, and the sun will dawn bright and clear -- I just won't be able to see it because of the cold front that has covered over my little patch of earth. God's Grace is as bright and sure and ever-shining as that sun. And intellectually, we all probably know that. But when the cold fronts of life move in, sometimes we wonder if the brightness of God's Grace has gone out. This is when we need to take comfort in the memories of the days that we basked in the warmth of His Grace. Those days were given to us as a gift and a reminder that God is always present. We have seen His Glory. He has come down to earth to us just so that we can truly know that he loves us. He showed us how much with His very life. "For with you is the fountain of life," Psalm 36:9. And that fountain is ever-flowing, just as His Son is ever-shining! So if the cold fronts of life tend to get you down, rest assured that His ever-flowing fountain will water your garden and the ever-shinig love of His Son will bring out your fruit. May the comfort of God's warm fronts be ever with you on the cold, snowy days! Rudy

Doers and Thinkers

It is hard being a doer in a world filled with thinkers. For me, the course of action many times seems very clear, but for some reason when I try to communicate the clarity of the vision to others, it seems to lose something in the process. I think I am beginning to realize that -- just like God didn't screw up when He made me; He also didn't screw up when He made them. The constant tug back and forth between those who "shoot from the hip" and those who take careful aim (painfully checking and rechecking to see if they have ammo) seems to be the way God planned for us to work together in community. I have also noticed that just like I tend to get impatient with the thinkers and want to leave them behind; the thinkers also get impatient with the doers. They may feel they are always "going off half cocked." How we manage this tug and pull is what separates a good team from a dysfunctional one. Was Solomon a thinker or a doer? He at least believed in team work: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Pro 15:22 But he is clear that too quick an action without the due diligence is folly: "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Pro 21:5 As a matter of fact I was unable to find one verse that condones the quick action of a doer, UNLESS that action was directed by God through wisdom and not by man's own selfish attitude. That doesn't bode well for us doers, unless, of course, we are able to rely on the Lord's wisdom and not our own. That would be a trick for both the thinkers and the doers to accomplish! "Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths smooth." Pro 3:5-6 Maybe God did make both of us and maybe He really does want us to work together. What a concept. May you acknowledge the Lord as you walk his path today! Rudy

See Jesus

"A man and his loving friends can destroy one another, but there is a loving friend who sticks closer than a brother." Proverbs 18:24 (NET) There is a popular little saying among some of my young adult students. It goes something like "you're being Jesus to me." What they mean by it is that at that particular time or in a period of hardship, that they have gone beyond being just a friend and allowed Jesus to minister through them to a hurting situation. It is kind of like a reverse application of the concept where Jesus says that if you have done it to the least of these you have done it to me. (Mat 25:40) In the above Proverb, Solomon acknowledges that friendship may not always be enough. He points towards a time when Jesus would say, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Luke 8:21 He tells us that we have a loving friend that is actually closer to us than our brother. And what my "kids" are saying is that sometime they get a glimpse of that special love that Jesus has for us through the actions of a friend that has gone out of the normal requirements of a friendship and allowed the light of Jesus to shine through them -- at a time when we needed that closeness that only Jesus can offer. So how often can we be "Jesus with skin on" for someone who needs us? Maybe today? I think everyday! But we gotta' be walking the walk. Satan can use just a little anger to get in the way of a whole lot of Jesus moments. May His Love flow through you today to a hurting world! Rudy

Two halves of a whole.

I know 21 years of marriage doesn't make me an expert, but I am beginning to see just how some things work. God put Dena and I together, of that I am sure. But I am also sure, just like the opposite poles of a magnet attract, so do people with opposite personality traits. That's why many times in a marriage one will be a morning person and one will not be a morning person. One will be a risk taker and one will be conservative. One will be a spender and one will be a saver, and so on and so on. This, I believe, is because God has two halves of a whole out there and brings them together in marriage. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Mat 19:5 Mark adds "So they are no longer two, but one." When we become one in marriage we become a complete person. In a perfect world, the fit would not have rough edges. But there are rough edges to the fit that take months, maybe years to mold together where one is not poking the other. This blending of the two personalities often takes the form of softening of the extremes of the two people. I have learned many things from Dena and I plan to learn many more. Luckily for me, she has a very patient, quiet way of teaching me. That's probably why I am still learning and growing after 20 years. Marriage is a process that takes many years to mature. During those years it takes commitment and sacrifice. But I am here to tell all of you, no matter where in this walk you are, that it is worth every sacrifice that must be made. It is worth every poky edge that you must give up to become a better half of your whole. May God bless your marriage whether it is now or in your future, for He is the God that makes two imperfect halves into a wonderful whole! Rudy

Banquet Hall

"He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love." Song of Songs 2:4 Noah (my 6 year old) just came down and gave me a hug. He is an early riser, just like me. Dena and I are traveling today, and he was already missing us. That was the reason for the hug. With seven children and a lovely wife, I must admit that I have received more love than my fair share. It is right to think of the love we have in our family on this day of Saint Valentine. But, our love falls short of the ideal. Even the most pure human love still has some selfish motive to it. Of course, we all continue to strive to mimic the perfect love that Christ had for us. The big difference is that He loved us when we were quite unlovable. When we could not even seek Him out or turn our face towards His radiance, He loved us. So like Solomon, we try to set a banquet table for our loved ones and we try to cover it with love. Yes, we fall short, but with Christ as our model, we ask for forgiveness and try again. "And now, these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." 1 Cor 13:13 It is truly a noble task to strive to emulate the love that Christ has shown us. Especially when the love we try to provide is patient and kind; does not envy or boast; is not proud; is not rude or self-seeking; is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrong; does not delight in evil but rejoices in Truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and never fails. (1 Cor 13) Wow!, Lord, your Love is awesome. Help us mere mortals measure up. Thank you for setting the standard! May the Lord bless you with His awesome Love! Rudy! will be in Chicago through the weekend, so I might not be able to write until Monday. Blessings to you all.

Dusty Boots

Since I live in Colorado, I can get away with my main pair of shoes being hiking boots. It's kind of a "way out west" dress code. And I walk through a pair of boots in about 8 or 9 months. Usually I am on the look out for a sale on hiking boots for the next upgrade. While I was in Chicago visiting my son this last week I found that sale. I would never be able to get a pair of good quality leather hiking boots for \$14.95 in Colorado but I found that deal in Chicago. Now, since I was flying and had already packed rather judiciously, the only problem I had was getting the old worn out boots home. I couldn't throw them away because I am a pack rat, and you never know when you might need them. So, I left them in my son's car, (Sorry, son!) so he could throw them away. That way I didn't have to bear with the pain of separation. Of course, we all know intellectually that God takes our cares and woes -- our old dusty boots -- and takes care of them for us. But how often are we really willing to leave our old ones behind and accept God's gracious new foot wear? We are kind of attached to all the places those old boots have traveled. For some reason we want to keep all the dust and grit; all the junk that may have accumulated from our walk. Jesus warns us about wanting to keep our old clothes when He offers us new ones. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless." Matthew 22:11 You see Jesus offers us new boots. For, if we show up with our old ones on they are disgusting to Him. And He gladly discards our old ones for us; we don't even have to be there for the pain of separation. Let Him! Let Him have your old boots! The new ones feel so fine! Thank you, Lord, for disposing of our garbage. And, Wow, what nice new boots!

Rudy

My Heart Soared

Ten years ago today, my heart soared like I had never, ever felt in my life. You see, for years, over 10 actually, my wife had really wanted a little girl. We even had her name picked out for our second child, who ended up Zachary. Then came Aaron and then Jeremiah. Already four boys and no girl. Many of our friends thought we were crazy for still wanting a girl. They couldn't imagine a family as big as ours had already grown, let alone trying for more. We had tried taking control, so after our fourth boy, Jeremiah was born, we finally just gave it over to God. We prayed every night for His will to be done. When Dena became pregnant again, we didn't even want to find out the baby's sex before it was born. So, when we went into the delivery room we really didn't know what would pop out, but we did know that whatever happened, we had prayed and totally (almost anyway) given it to the Lord. When Hannah was finally born, my heart and spirit soared like at no other time in my life! There were many times in that 10 year waiting period that Dena and I would have this conversation. She would ask me something like, "If God doesn't want me to have a girl then why has He put this desire in my heart?" And, of course, I would say something smart like, "I don't know, honey." I did a lot of hugging in those years, because I really didn't have words of comfort for her. Hind sight now allows me to quote this verse: "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them." Psalm 145:18-19 or "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." (16) Now the trick is for me to remember the way in which God so wonderfully answered our prayers and put my trust in His promises, not in my own desire for control. What a sweet blessing that surrender is! May you experience the sweet fulfillment of God's riches! Rudy

Bad Debt

"Do not be found among those who make deals with a handshake, among those who guarantee other people's loans." Proverbs 22:26 (NET) Here is the same verse in the NIV: "Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts." I just wonder how many of us in society nowadays know that the Bible says not to go into debt that requires collateral? Did you know? I must admit that I haven't taken Solomon's wisdom on this one. Why do you think Solomon would give this advice? Isn't debt the only way most people can own a home these days? Isn't debt the best way to build a business? Where would most of us be without the ability to use Other People's Money? I guess the honest answer is: a lot better off. Solomon tells us earlier in this very chapter of Proverbs that "the borrower is a slave to the lender." (7) But I think that even a bigger problem with debt is that it takes the reliance off of the Lord and puts it on the money lender. Can we not trust God to provide us with all that we need? He promises that He will. Oh, but it might not be on our timeframe, right? Most likely, we would have to wait and not be able to buy when we want to or as big as we wanted. Or maybe we would even have to live with our parents for a while; surely God wouldn't expect us to do that! OK, enough. I think you know how I feel about debt. I, myself am trying to reverse past mistakes and I hope God will be with me on it. I would love to serve Him more fully, and not be a slave to my many lenders. I wish someone would have told me all of this when I was just starting out. But, God is faithful, even to old fools. Trust in His provision! May the Lord bless and keep you, both now and forevermore! Rudy

Eternal Life

Every once in a while I feel like stretching your thinking a little bit. First, let me say that it is OK if you don't agree with me on this. It is just a feeling that gives me comfort, but I don't think it rises to the level of doctrine. As some of you know, my Father-in-law has already won his eternal rest. He was a very dear man and I considered him my friend. Now brace yourselves. I have come to believe that I am already with him in the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ. You see, simply put, time is a creation of God for the world to exist in. He gave us this structure when He created the world, but God -- and heaven -- are outside of time. When we die, I believe we step out of the dimension we call time. With a little thought on this matter, I can see how, when I show up in heaven, everybody that is near and dear to me that have begun eternal life here on earth will already be there. This is one way that I can rationalize the words of Jesus to the thief of the cross. "Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" Luke 23:43 Yes, the thief was dying, but Jesus still had work to do in the temporal realm; victory trip to Hades, rising from the dead, and so on. The other point that helps this little concept is the fact that once we believe in Jesus we have already begun our eternal life. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; ... I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5: 11-13 Once we have the testimony that Jesus Christ is our Lord we have begun eternal life! Death no longer has any power over us. Heaven cannot be snatched away from us by any power on this earth, save our own rejection. I really enjoy the mental image of all of us singing praises to the God of our salvation. I am pretty sure my Father-in-law is directing the choir. May the Lord's Peace be on you all! Rudy

Wisdom

"A house is built with wisdom; its foundation is understanding; its rooms are filled with knowledge, with every kind of riches, both precious and pleasant." Proverbs 24:3-4 If God has gifted us with a simple intellect, how are we to fill our homes with wisdom? I would like you to think of this verse in the same way that we think of John 1 or "The angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament. First to John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The Word is Jesus. Most theologians also believe that whenever the term "The angel of the Lord" is used in the Old Testament it also refers to a pre-incarnate form of Jesus. For instance in Gen 16:10 when the Angel is talking to Hagar: "Then the angel of the Lord told her, 'Go back to your mistress and submit to her.' The angel added, 'I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.'" Because the angel uses the first person "I" it is clear that God is talking. Likewise wisdom is Christ. "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God -- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." 1 Cor 2:30 This is why Paul says that he has vowed to know only Christ crucified. So when Solomon says that "Wisdom will save you" (Pro 2:12) he is not speaking idolatry, he is speaking Truth that we should heed. So whether your intellect is simple or dizzying, you need to look to Christ for your source of wisdom. For in Him all study, knowledge and growth should be centered. Without Christ knowledge just puffs up and makes one conceited. But with Christ, knowledge is a tool that leads to wisdom and therefore can change the world. Seek Wisdom and pursue it -- for it is your salvation. May the God of all Wisdom be with you in a most personal way! Rudy

The doorways of LifeGod will provide for us exciting doorways to step through in this life. Chances for ministry and blessings; chances for love and family; chances to serve Him and our fellow man. But, He will not force us to walk through them. He may prod and cajole, He will most defiantly promise, but He will not force us through the doorways of life. Faith is required. We can sit at the doorway and analyze, figure and calculate. We may ask the advice of trusted friends. We may pray for wisdom and insight, but when it is all said and done, it is a decision between you and God and it is based on Faith. He will bless us when our Faith is in Him. He will not bless us when our faith is in ourselves. As a matter of fact the opposite is true. When our faith is in ourselves, not only will blessing not come, but the God's lack of blessing and even His curse cannot be far behind. Think of the story of the Israelites when faced with the decision to enter the promised land for the first time. Twelve spies were sent into the land. 10 came back afraid and two had a faithful report. Caleb spoke for the two. "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'" Num 13:30 But the doubters were quick to respond before the voters assembly of the Israelites: "But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'" (31 & 33) The negative -- faithless -- report ruled the day, and they were sent on a forty year quest for all to die save the two faithful spies. Just as God did not force the Israelites through the doorway to His promised land, neither does He force us through the doorway of our future. We are not robots. We are God's creation, designed to reach out in Faith to our Creator; not cower like grasshoppers. May our God give you Faith to make your next step! Rudy

Stewardship

There are at least a few people that believe that the Biblical concept of stewardship is the antithesis of Faith. Of course, I don't believe that but it doesn't matter what I believe. It matters what the Bible teaches. So I thought I would just examine some of the stewardship passages and see what conclusions we might draw. The first two concepts are ones that maybe you will accept without the texts (1). They are: 1. God owns everything, and 2. God is the source of everything. So the next hurdle is what our relationship to what God has provided should be. Matthew 25:14-30 is the story of the Master who gives talents to three servants; one 5 talents, one 3 talents and one 1 talent. We know the story. The one with 5 doubled them and gave his master ten, the same with the next guy. However, the one with only one talent buried his talent and did nothing. When the master returns the two that took risk with their talents were rewarded. "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness." Mat 25:21 Of course, we all know the other one with just one talent was chastised by the master for not at least putting the talent on deposit at the bank to gain the interest. What did stewardship really mean in this parable? It meant taking risk with the gift God has given us and I propose to you that you can only take that risk in Faith. Faith is what the guy with just one talent lacked, however he had fear in abundance. How in the world can we please God if we look to the future in fear? Faith in God's promises is the only way we can face the future without fear totally running our lives. At least in this example, Faith and stewardship seems to be aligned closely. We'll check out another example tomorrow. I would love to hear your ideas on this issue. Of course, you have my address. May the Lord give each of you wisdom and discernment as you look to the future. Rudy(1) Ex 19:5, Ps 24:1, Hag 2:8, Ge 26:12-13, 1 Co 4:7, Ro 12:3,6, Mt 6:7, Jn 3:27

Entrusted

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 Before this verse Paul talks about the "wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight." And after this verse he says, "I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court." Each one of us has been entrusted with the Holy Spirit through whom all wisdom is given. Now, I'll be the very first to admit that the Wisdom is clouded by the world and our own selfishness so that it becomes as if it were a poor reflection in a mirror. But even that poor reflection is more powerful than all the worldly wisdom we could gain. We should try to clean the mirror, not refine the worldly wisdom. OK, let me give you a little insight as to why I have been writing on this subject. I actually went to a voter's meeting on Sunday, where we had the best turnout in my memory. We were talking about expansion plans, in other words financial commitment. I gave a little prepared speech on how we need to look at the decision from a "Faith in God" standpoint. The very next person that spoke started his rebuttal by saying, 'Yes, but God calls us to be good stewards.' So, I simply decided to look at stewardship passages, and so far not one of them says that you can even be a good steward without Faith. Stewardship is based on Faith -- not the worldly wisdom of calculating and projecting. If we have been given a trust we must prove faithful! Maybe nobody else sees this as such a black and white issue. Maybe I'll get off my high horse and write about something else tomorrow. Maybe. May the Lord bless you with Faith to guide you along the way. Rudy

Basking

Every once in a while I enjoy just basking in a promise of God. It is kind of like standing a few extra minutes in a hot shower or slipping into a hot tub. Just letting the Truth of His words surround you and bring you relaxation and healing is many times the comfort we need in this "bounce you off the wall" kind of world. So here are the words of one of God's promise as expressed through Paul: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ... And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6,7,19 Praise God and enjoy the warmth! Rudy

Rest

Just recently, Dena, my wonderful wife, showed me a devotion from Portals of Prayer. This particular author was echoing one of my "Great Truths" and whenever Dena finds someone that agrees with me she likes to point it out, probably because it doesn't happen very often. In essence, he was saying how a successful vacation these days tends to be how much exciting activity you can cram into as few days as possible. So much so, that when you return you need a vacation just to rest up from your vacation. Then he said we need to schedule in restful vacations, where we can build relationships with each other and grow in God's Word together. For literally years, I have wanted to build a Christian Retreat Center that would allow people to have just that kind of vacation. Maybe someday it will happen. But between now and then I have started a ministry at my church called FARM which stands for Family Adventure and Recreational Ministry; and we do little things along the lines of the Grand Plan of Someday. Two things got me going on this subject this morning. One, an upcoming event, which you can read about in the next paragraph if you are interested. The other was my reading in Proverbs for this morning. 29:18 says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish," (KJV) I have been called a lot of things in my life time, many of which can't be repeated; but one of the nicer things is visionary. And this little verse gave me hope that maybe there is a place for my dream in the overall scheme of things. I have become patient and am willing to wait upon the Lord for His timing. And for some reason this little verse added hope. May the Lord add Hope to your vision as you look to the future in Him. Rudy

Guiding Light

It was not my intent to offend you last week when I was ranting and raving about stepping out in Faith. And if I did so please accept my apologies. Let me try one more time, to see if I can get a point across without making you think I am putting anyone down. The Fact is that the saving Faith we have is a gift from God. I cannot by my own reason or strength take credit for that Faith or credit it to my account. Likewise, the Spiritual Gift of Faith is also a gift from God. We also cannot take any credit for the possession of this gift, or the amount of it's abundance in our life. We can, however, take a sober assessment of the gift and then put it to use. "Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given you." Romans 12:3 You see, we can either look to the future with the Faith that has been given us or we can look to the future through the filter of our fears. And there are plenty of fears: We might go bankrupt. They might not like us anymore. We might fail. We might look foolish. Or even - We might succeed! All of the future visions that are based on fears are grounded in our own strength to succeed. We all have Faith, whatever amount God has given us, that should be used to guide us into the future. A future based on the strength of God not on our own strength. Jesus Christ is our Guiding Light. He alone is worthy to be the rudder that steers us to the future. Each of us have the choice whether to look to our fears or the Faith that God has given us for our sense of direction. Each of us can make that choice. Choose wisely! May the Lord guide and direct your coming and your going, both now and forevermore. Rudy

Small Groups

I have had several people tell me recently that my college Bible study that meets on Sunday mornings was getting too big and they didn't like the feel of it anymore. Instead, they preferred a smaller group feel like the Monday Bible study we have at the college cafe. It really just reinforced for me what I have known for a long time. Relationships are built in small groups. And until there is a relationship, it is very difficult to share the love of Christ with an individual. Of course, the big hurdle to small group ministry is the fact that the Pastor doesn't have the time to meet with 40 or 50 small groups each week. He really needs to equip us lay type people to meet with those small groups. Then his ministry is magnified many fold, just as Jesus sent out His disciples. I know this is a new paradigm; a new way of doing things. But really it isn't new. It's really old. It is the way the Christian church did ministry for the first three hundred years of it's existence. But when the Roman emperor declared that the entire empire would become Christian, then our current paradigm of "clergy" and "parish" ministry was developed. It is time for a shift back to the old ways. It is time for each Christian to realize that Peter was writing to all of us when he said: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9 I purpose to you that we are part of a new "old" paradigm, not Pastors and lay people anymore, now we are equipers and doers! What is God calling you to do for His kingdom? May He open your eyes to His will! Rudy

2.4 Hours

We all intellectually know that God owns everything we have. We know that even our life breath is on loan from God. The Bible says that we should respond with a thank offering of 10%. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' say the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Malachi 3:10 And some of us may actually do that on good days. But for us blessed Americans, giving our money is easy. Easier, at least, than giving our time. What if we actually tithed of our time? Actually gave God a quality 2.4 hours each day that were spent getting to know His Word and Praising Him as our Creator? A week ago was Ash Wednesday, and I must admit I got a little upset by all the people talking about what they were giving up for Lent. I know the concept is whenever you reach for that pop or candy bar you gave up you are supposed to think of Christ giving up His All for each one of us. And so if you use it that way, sure go ahead and give up something. But what if we gave something instead of giving up something? What if, for the rest of lent you just tried to tithe your time to God? Each day now, don't hold over hours till Sunday and then give Him everything in one day. Try it for one week. Maybe even try it for just one day. Of course, the only way it will work is to keep track of it. Keep a diary and record your insights along with the amount of time and what you accomplished for God each day. --Just a thought on how "giving" might be better than "giving up." May the Lord bless the time that He has given you! Rudy

Let us Pray

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." James 5:13 "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." James 4:3 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked for." 1 John 5:14-15 "(Jesus) went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'" Mat 26:42 "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to the mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'" Mat 21:21 "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it (the thorn) away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor 12:9 "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Jude 17-20 May the God who gives us the desire to pray and Who hears every word, be the answer to all your desires! Rudy

Jesus passed me by.

(Poetic license on Acts 2) I had my own spot. In fact, I had had that spot for years. If you are a beggar the way I was, location was everything. All my life had been spent in that spot. Each morning a couple of my buds would carry me to my spot right outside the Temple, a gate called Beautiful. Even though my fellow countrymen were a tight lot, I could still squeak out a decent living from the coins they would toss every once in a while. The festivals were the best because there were people from out of town that would come only once or twice a year. They recognized me at my spot and would almost always have a coin for me. The past few years had been better than most because of this guy called Jesus. Oh, Jesus never gave me money but he generated a lot of traffic. And, as any beggar knows, traffic is what you want. I was more happy about this Jesus because of the traffic than His supposed Messiahship. What did I need with a Messiah? I needed money to pay the rent on my miserable hovel. Without legs to carry me around, money was the only bargaining chip I had. I even had to tip the little boy who brought me the bread each day. But, hey, everyone has to make a living, right? And besides, I had been begging since I could talk, and after forty years you get to know who your friends are. Then one day everything changed. Money had been tight because everyone was on edge. This whole crucifixion had gotten on people's nerves. They weren't paying enough attention to me. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I knew Peter and John just as guys who used to hang with this Jesus. They had never given me anything in the past but I was desperate. I caught Peter's eye as he was walking through the gate. For a good beggar, eye contact is everything! With my best face I asked for a meager coin. He stopped! All right, I thought -- lunch! Boy, was I ever wrong. Before I knew what was happening, he reach out and grabbed my hand and said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, WALK!" I remember my legs. The second he said Jesus' name, my legs started tingling. Then the strength! It just came all at once. I could stand! I could even jump! It took me a couple of seconds to realized just what this Peter had done. By the name of the one who had been crucified, Peter had made my legs work! I had never in my life experienced such a wonderful feeling. If Jesus could do this kind of thing after He was dead, why hadn't I called out His name when he had passed by me those many times in the past three years? I don't think I'll ever figure that one out. Why I had never called on the name of Jesus when he was right in front of me, I'll never know. But I was sure glad Peter stopped that day. That day my old life was gone forever, and a new life had begun. Praise the Name of Jesus. May the power and glory of our Risen Lord be evident to you today! Rudy

Unschooling, ordinary men

My Father-in-law was a great Pastor. I believe what made him great was his reliance on God, his truly unique way that he could emphasize with people and his attention to detail. Except maybe the reliance on God, I have none of the qualities that made my Father-in-law a great Pastor. When he saw me after his daughter, I bet he just groaned on the inside. However, before he passed away, I would like to think that he came to the point where he was glad that I was the one who had married his daughter. But we never reached agreement on this little point of "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:13) being able to be in ministry. Every time the subject came up, he would become very defensive and ask if I thought his learning and schooling were worthless. Of course, I would always answer that I was very happy that he had such tremendous learning and that it was a great asset to God's kingdom here on earth. BUT, his learning or all the seminary trained people of all time does not negate the Truth that God works through whom He chooses. And He can work through anyone. Whether that person is Pilate, who hung the first proclamation of Jesus' Kingship on the cross or Peter and John who witnessed boldly to the Sanhedrin. Here, before the religious rulers of the day, Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8) was able to proclaim that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Yes, we should strive to learn all that we can, but we should never let the lack of a degree dictate whether we can witness to the salvation which has been given to us. We are each missionaries, with the mission field waiting just outside our doors, in our classrooms and workplaces. And even if we are "unschooled, ordinary men," we can still be "filled with the Holy Spirit and (speak) the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:31) May God show you His mission field and equip you for the harvest! Rudy

Reality Check

First let me give you some wonderful insight from a first century Jew named Gamaliel. When the Sanhedrin wanted to put Peter and the other disciples to death, Gamaliel had this counsel: "For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourself fighting against God." (Acts 5:38) My prayer to God is that I do nothing that is of "human origin" but only those things that are "from God." To this end I would like to submit to your review regarding these morning talks that come out of my ivory tower (which is really located in my basement.) **Please provide constructive criticism** regarding these devotions. Do they help your daily walk? Are you getting tired of hearing all these stupid stories from my past? Is there a new direction that you would like to see me go? Or how about just go away? For me, this is just a little reality check to see if I am still relevant to anyone out there in email land. Of course, if I was directly connected I wouldn't need your input, but unfortunately we all see but through a dark glass. And when your looking through the bottom of a coke bottle things might get a little distorted every once in a while. Peace on you all! Rudy

Mountain Dew, TOO?

Our Senior Pastor last Sunday called for a time of prayer and fasting to help us make an important decision that is before us. So tomorrow is the first day of fasting. Now, personally, I have no real trouble giving up food for one day each week for the next 90 days. I have plenty extra to hold me through. But, as I was sitting here pondering tomorrow the thought came to me, "Does fasting mean giving up Mountain Dew, TOO?" If it does, I thought, I had better go into the mountains to get away from everyone, just so nobody dies. So do you mind going on a little search with me to find out just what I should give up when I fast? And why? Jesus acknowledges the practice and says there is blessing if you don't do it as a show off thing. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Mat 6:17-18 So that says if I do give up Mountain Dew, I can't wine about it. No company for this misery! I think Isaiah 58 tells us the true reason for fasting. It says that an empty ritual of fasting that doesn't end in a changed lifestyle is not pleasing to God. Then as a result of the changed lifestyle, that resulted from fasting, we are given this promise: "Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, Here am I." 58:9 Good insight as to why I am to fast, but no help with the Dew issue. I'll keep searching and let you know of any new insights. For all of you that are also fasting, are you giving up your form of caffeine? Just curious. May you all be motivated to live a new life for God! Rudy

Yes, Dew, too!

I had already decided to give up the dew, but a certain friend reinforced it. From my perspective, I wanted to prove to myself that my god was not my belly. "For as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." Phil 3:18 But then a good friend, whose permission I have not gotten to quote him, (so I'll only refer to him as Chris Snitko) sent me this email: "OF COURSE you have to give up the Dew TOO! Throughout the OT and NT, God answers prayers during heavy prayers and fasting. You hit the two main verses when you mentioned Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6, but you won't find verses specifically saying what to give up, especially Dew. But after reading multiple verses about fasting, the underlying message from God is he wants us to give up all worldly desires and have 100% of our reliance on him. If we still need to hang on to one or a few worldly vices to get us through the fast, I think it displeases Him. In Zechariah 7:4-7 God asks "Did you really fast for Me?" He wants us humbled (Psalm 35) and chastening our souls (Psalm 69). So to me, He's telling you "lay off the Dew and I'll carry you through this!" YOU CAN DO IT :) P.S I can't imagine you going without it tho' (snicker)" I especially like the saying Chris has given me to get me through this day; "Lay off the dew and I'll carry you through." May the Lord be with you as he carries you through! Rudy (and Chris)

Jail Break

This discussion may qualify as one of those "useless discussions," so if those bother you, tune out for today. But I really am going somewhere with it. Do you think Joseph (sold into slavery, wrongfully jailed) should have tried a jail break? He was put in jail for being accused of molesting Potiphar's wife. Then he actually got to use his God given gifts and interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. "The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream." Gen 40:23-41:1 Now it is my feeling that Joseph did not have divine insight into his situation other than the dreams of his childhood. Here, during these two years of waiting in jail, he only had his faith in God to preserve him. But how did he know that God didn't want him to bust out of the joint? We see in Acts 8:1 that on the day of Stephen's stoning "a great persecution broke out against the church." But just one paragraph later we see that this was God's great plan to implement church growth. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." (8:4) So in one case Joseph submitted to incarceration and in another the people ran. But how are we to take these truths and determine when we are to submit and when we are to press ahead? I see no evidence in the text to indicate that either Joseph or the early church were given directions from God as to their course of action. Joseph was obviously an ambitious man, would we not have looked at him in jail and asked, "Where's your ambition? Are you content to rot while you wait on God to act?" Or could he have given us a response that would have satisfied the doubt? Struggle and trust -- dependence and ambition; where's the balance? Sorry, I have no answers on this one. Just questions for that great information booth in the sky. May the Peace that can only come from our Creator rest on you today! RudyPS Yes, I went 24 hours without Mountain Dew. No one died, but there were a few people that didn't know just how close they came. I am now going to go eat. You can maybe see from today's devo where my mind goes when it is deprived of nourishment. It is not a pretty sight.

Mission and Marriage

Life experience is a great teacher. The refiner's fire that God has put me through over the past twenty years has helped me see a balance to the line that God has called me to walk. I still many times err on one side or the other, being pulled back and forth like two sides of a tug of war rope. But, at least intellectually, I can see that there is a divinely directed balance between my marriage and family and the mission that God calls me to. Paul warns us that if we are married that the care of our wife will divide our interests between God and the world. (1 Cor 7:32) He does say to be fully devoted to the Lord we should not marry. But most of us will not have that particular gift of celibacy and are or will be married. So, one lesson that I have learned that I would like to pass on, is this: if you, husband or wife, feel a calling from God to do this mission or that mission, UNLESS your spouse confirms that calling, it is not God doing the calling. So what am I exactly saying? First, when you are married, the "two become one flesh." So when God issues a call, He is calling both of you, because in His sight you are one. Secondly, when God tells us "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25)," I believe Paul is telling us that our wife is, by virtue of her position, our primary mission in life. She is equal to the church in the life of Jesus, which He literally put everything else aside for and laid down His life for. God may call us to do many other things, but being married is the first and foremost God given mission of each husband. ALL other callings must take a second position to this first calling. In my two brief years as a "parish youthworker" I saw too clearly how the care for the flock of God could easily supplant the care for the family God has given me. As I said in the beginning, it is a balance that is continually tested. May each of you be blessed in your walk with the Lord! Rudy

Jabez?

I hadn't remembered this Old Testament guy either until I recently read this little book called "The Prayer of Jabez." It is by a guy named Bruce Wilkinson, and just simply talks about this Jabez dude whom we meet in the book of 1 Chronicles 4:9. It is a good book and I think each one of you should run out and buy the book and read it. Then as the book says start praying the prayer that Jabez prayed. I'll give you the version that appears in Bruce's book because it is a little different from the NIV: And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain." So God granted him what he requested. The book is published by Multnomah Publishers and they have a web site of: www.multnomah.net/theprayerofjabez. I pray that the same could be true for each of you: that God would grant what you request! Peace! Rudy

A Wedged Dog

I have a cockapoo. It's not a bird it's a dog. A little hairy, fat dog, that sleeps on a mat that we lay out for her in the kitchen at night. Other than that, she is an outside dog. Sometimes, when I come into the room to let her out in the morning she is a little more excited than usual to get out. Well, this morning was one of those times. Our side door that she goes out of, swings in to open. So as I was opening the door to let her out her timing was a little off and she tried to get out before I had the door open enough for her. The result was a wedged dog. A wedged dog between the door and the wall, unable to go forward. Unless she decided to back up and reassess the situation she was not going to get outside, which at that point in time was very important to her. How many times do we become a wedge in the doorway of ministry that God is opening for us? This happened to Peter and the apostles when God first tried to tell them that the Good news was for all people, not just the chosen frozen. Even though in the past Peter had not even been able to eat with Gentiles, he was now supposed to share the gospel with them. When he is "called on the carpet" for his ministry to them, he says, "who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17) The miraculous symphony of life, for us Christians, has a director. Many times we might experience the cacophony of life and think there is no way God is still directing. But every once in a while I catch the sound of pure harmony and know that all I have to do is play my instrument and trust God with the results. And, of course, I don't want my own need for control to end up in the "wedged dog syndrome." May you be blessed with the symphony from on high! Rudy

Post Jesus Blessings

There are some definite differences between the life of the Old Testament as compared as to the life that we are able to live this side of the empty tomb. Some of the early Christians wanted all new believers to be circumcised. We are told about the debate and then told of the answer. Circumcision was not needed to become a follower of Jesus. This was a major shift in the thinking of the day, and needless to say, met with some resistance. I am going to talk about another shift that happened the day Jesus died for our sins that is still meeting some resistance. "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Mat 27:50-51 Even as a young child, I was taught that this meant that there was no longer a need for a priest to approach God the Father on our behalf. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim 2:5 We no longer have to sit outside the tent of meeting waiting for Moses to get done talking with God and tell us what's up. Now we are all "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Pet 2:9 I am getting to my point, stay with me. This miraculous change in our relationship with God affects all our traditional relationships. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal 3:28 I know this will tick some people off, but it is clear at least to me, that the Old Testament relationship between men and women is now different. The woman is no longer delegated to the role of helpmate, but along with the slave and the Greek is given equal access to God through Jesus Christ. There, I said it. It is an equal partnership. The heavy handed dude of the Old Testament is gone with the tearing of the curtain. May the Lord Guide your Ministry! Rudy

From my Heart

OK, so I have a few of you upset, I am glad to see you thinking and turning to Scripture for the answers, for that is the only source of knowledge. Of course, I believe that there should be one Spiritual Head of the home, and I try my best to fulfill that role in my home. Two butts: But number one. If the husband is either incapable or unwilling or nonexistent, it falls to the woman to become the Spiritual Head of the home. Now for but number two. This I believe is where most of you are having a problem with my words. The woman is called to "submit" to the husband in a marriage. The very next verse tells the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ love the church and gave himself up for her." Eph 5:21,22,25 Now to draw our example from the way that Christ loved the church is a great way to understand how God wants us to love our wives. First, Christ was only confrontational with the demons and the Jews (this is not the church). Whenever he was talking with his followers, we only see love as the rule. He loved them into submission. The kind of submission talked about in Eph is circular, not hierarchical. There is a huge "control demon" active in our culture today. We see it in our society, but mostly I see it in our church. Satan knows if he can get us fighting about control issues then we won't be doing ministry -- and lost people will die before we get off our high and mighty pulpit and take the life saving Word to them. Control is an illusion. God is in control -- of our lives and our marriages. Many times my wife has properly discerned God's will for us, and because we are in partnership -- not dictatorship -- she has felt comfortable sharing her views with me. I would be foolish to go through life without her council. Does that make me not the Spiritual Head of my house? No way! It makes me a much better Spiritual Head of this house! May God bless you with insight on the workings of all the little control demons in your life. RudyPS. I am off on a FARM trip to Moab next week so you won't be getting any devos. Enjoy the break, and I'll catch you on the flip side.

Hot Tub Sing-a-long

For those of you that were there -- what an Awesome praise service! For those of you that missed it, I'll try to fill you in. F.A.R.M.* sponsored a 5 day trip to Moab, Utah where we saw the sights of God's awesome creation, had some fun biking and hiking, and tried some extreme 4 wheeling. But for me, the high point of the week came in the Hot Tub. Thanks to some wonderfully full voices that came along on the trip and the acoustics of this humid hot tub room, we sounded as good as the monks in the Abbey from Sound of Music. And I know many people who would not step inside a church got to hear the praise of our Almighty Creator!"Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. ... Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." Psalm 150:1, 6 In my life, I have enjoyed many times of wonderful Praise to God. I especially like the feeling of my spirit getting involved in the act. It's like your heart is singing along with your voice. That's what happened in the hot tub room. Yes, we had a great time recreating in God's wonderful creation. And yes, we had some insightful Bible studies. And, yes, we built relationships. But, Man!, I would have gone just for that Praise Service that we had in the hot tub! I pray that each of you will look for the times when your Praise might reach out and touch someone else in a loving and meaningful way! May the Lord bless your coming in and your going out, both today and forevermore!Rudy*Family Adventure and Recreational Ministry is a personal ministry that I have started through Holy Cross Lutheran Church.

Diagnosis

There is a whole lot of judging going on. On Sunday, in our class, we talked about our own personal reaction to a homeless person. Most of us, deep down, felt that they were there -- in their situation -- because of their own choices. I think it is hard for us to realize, that but for the Grace of God, any one of us could be in the same position. For some reason, the whole concept of "speaking the truth in love" has gotten way carried away in the minds of most Christians. We are not called to judge people, that is God's job alone. He only calls us to love people. But the fact is there is not one sin that we can point out that we ourselves are not guilty of. The Diagnosis is that we all fall short of God's Glory, we have all sinned, we all have the same terminal disease. The only difference between "us" and "them" is that we have the cure. Picture yourself with a new wonder drug that would instantaneously heal all sickness, and not only that, you have an inexhaustible supply! But you just walk around with it in your pocket, afraid to share it with anyone. Jesus is the cure for the sickness that ails mankind. And, yes, He is inexhaustible! We can share Him all over the world, or our town, and He will never run short of His Grace. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17 When we point at someone else, it is just a case of the "pot calling the kettle black." Instead we need to share the solution, the cure, the white robe of Jesus, which covers over all our sins. Don't judge -- just love. May you Glory in the Grace of God! Rudy

I Mist-ted You

My youngest child, Naomi, who is now four, has this cute little way of greeting our family members when they walk in the door. For some reason she accentuates the past tense of missed and it comes out something like "I mist-ted you." And, for some reason, maybe the genuineness in her voice, when she says it to me, it just spreads a warmth throughout me that is hard to explain. Sabrina* says, "It's the best feeling ever." Jackie* went with FARM to Moab last week and said when she got back home she "went through withdrawal from the sudden lack of hand holding." In fact, during the whole Moab trip there was a whole lot of fellowship going on. These two examples, I believe, are just a little glimpse of the type of fellowship that the authors of the New Testament meant when they used the Greek word *koinonia*. Paul talks about it in the opening paragraphs of 1 Corinthians, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." (9) *Koinonia* means "participation, communion, and fellowship." But I believe it is a deeper relationship than the Sunday morning, "Hi, how are you" kind of relationship. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." 1 John 1:7 It is a kind of fellowship that says, "I mist-ted you" and really means it. And when it comes from the heart it fills you with warmth when you hear it. It is the kind of reunion that we will all feel when we get to heaven. Until then it is our responsibility to create *koinonia* here on earth. Genuineness in relationships is a great place to start. But communion in our spirits through our Lord Jesus Christ is where it should aim. I pray that each of you who receive this will spread a little fellowship in your earthly circle today. May the Lord Bless you with his communion! Rudy* Sabrina and Jackie are both college students. Sabrina has been living in the Bauer household for 9 months now.

Worship in a New Way

I am going to take a look at what the New testament says about how we should worship since the curtain of the Holy of Holies has been torn. I don't know for sure where this is going to take us, but I do think it will lead in a different direction from our traditions. In pondering it, I believe many of our traditions are based on Old Testament Tabernacle type traditions. I know many of you will once again get tick off at me for attacking the traditions of the church. But, I am not advocating anything -- at least not yet. I just want to explore what the Word teaches us about the community of believers and how we should live and worship in a post resurrection world. My main pivot point is that there is now only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." Acts 20:7 "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the day approaching." Heb 10:25 "We who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" Phi 3:3 "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." 1 Tim 4:13 Jesus said, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:24 Think on these and send me your thoughts and more verses. Peace to all you strive to worship their Creator. May He bless you today and forevermore. Rudy

Worship, Part 2

"What should we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. ... Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encourage. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of the prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. ... But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." 1 Cor 14:26, 29-33, 40 My Bible referred me back to 1 Cor 12:7 concerning the word "everyone" in the first sentence. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." I know yesterday and today's readings are just random Scripture quotes, but I think they all tie together to tell us how we should worship under the new testament of Jesus' blood. It is different from the OT style of doing things. Luther wrote this wonderful "Treatise on the New Testament" which speaks directly about worship. He states that communion is the only legitimate element of worship. "Henceforth, therefore, there is no other external order for the service of God except the mass." He goes on to say that all other elements of worship are things added by men. I don't know where I am going with this discussion, but we all get time to think and pray about it. Mon through Wed of next week, I am off to do outdoor Ed at a camp with two of my boys. We'll see where the Holy Spirit takes us by then. May the Lord bless you and illuminate your brain! Rudy

New Covenant

"This is my body given for you." "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." Luke 22:19&20 Today we celebrate the day which our Lord gave us the new covenant of His blood. I have been writing about worship and I believe that the subject of worship comes to this very point of the new covenant. Christ gave us a NEW Covenant of His body and blood. When the new came, the old passed away. This gift of Jesus' blood and body, which was poured out for many, is the central focus of the new covenant. The "mass" or the "Eucharist" or "communion" or even the "breaking of the bread," is and should be the central focus of the our act of remembrance of Jesus until we come into His kingdom. Yes, there are other elements of worship that can be added, but this is the very one, central element which should never be deleted. Nor should it be relegated to a lessor position in the service. I really believe it IS worship and all other elements of worship should revolve around it. For in it alone does our Savior pour out His very life blood to cover over our most grievous, sinful life. For in it, He comes to each one of us, and alone is our mediator with the Father. We need no other! Christ alone is sufficient! There is no longer any abuse of power, whether it be the Pope or a Hitler, a synod or a denomination, that can separate us from the Love of God that he has poured out for each one of us in the Blood of His Son. And yet, this very act which is meant to connect each one of us individually to God is meant also to strengthen the community of believers on earth, until He comes to takes us home. How great an act of worship! Spend today in awesome appreciation of what our Lord has done for us! May the assurance of our forgiveness be wholly evident to you today! Rudy

What a Rip

I recently had the chance to view a traveling Smithsonian exhibit on the history of the Vikings. I found much of it very interesting. The Christian religion was introduced to Iceland in the 800-900 AD time frame, and according to the exhibit, the Vikings were quick to convert. There was a reported element to the conversion that I found troubling, however. The Priests were very controlling. The access to the sacraments and the forgiveness of sins all came with a price. And the priests were the only ones that could grant these blessings. What we know as a very freeing religion was being taught as a very controlling and legalistic religion. It just proves that the nature of mankind is corrupted by original sin and that there is nothing new under the sun. But that is not how it is supposed to be. On the day that Jesus died; at the very moment that Jesus gave up His spirit, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Mat 27:51 For a people that needed object lessons, this was a big one. The years of sacrificial offerings; of priests entering the Holy of Holies; of God coming to the people through just one Prophet had ended. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim 2:5 This is the basis for all our response (worship) to God. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9 We are not controlled by one priest nor are we to limit access to God for other people. We are to declare the wonderful relationship we have with the Son who grants us access to the Father -- direct and unhindered! It is truly a most gracious relationship. And we get all the benefit. All because of Jesus' great sacrifice. Praise God for Good Friday! May the reality of our Relationship with the Father be clear to you on this Good Friday! Rudy

The Body of the Lord

Jason, my oldest son, has been home from college for Easter and we had an interesting discussion last night. It revolved around the "Body of Christ" which we normally interpret as the whole Christian church on earth and the "Body of the Lord" which I normally interpret as the presence of Jesus Christ in Communion. The verse we were discussing was: "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." 1 Corinthians 11:29 Earlier in the section, Paul is talking about everyone coming together in an unruly fashion and that the meal they had was not the Lord's Supper. Then Paul gives us the familiar words of the institution, then he gives us this section about recognizing the "body of the Lord." I have always taken the verse to mean Communion, but Jason felt it mainly meant the church. Since this concept is crucial to our understanding of worship, I thought I would delve into the Greek and see if any sense could be made of it. The Greek word study that I pulled out of my Library says: "Those who partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper must recognize the reality which they signify."* In reading through most of what the author says on the subject it would seem to me that the Greek would indicate the real presence of our Lord's body in communion. But there is no doubt that the very same words are used to refer to the whole Christian church. With either and/or both interpretations, I believe it is important for the assembled body of believers to come together and partake of the body and blood of our Lord on a regular basis in a respectful and worshipful setting, fully acknowledging that they are not just eating an ordinary meal, but partaking in a feast that was instituted by Christ Himself. It also gives us a glimpse of the future feast that we will all join in in our Father's Kingdom, where we will feast with the Risen Lord. Happy Easter! HE IS RISEN, INDEED! Rudy* Page 1359, "The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament," by Zodhiates

New Pare of Dimes

I asked my wife, Dena, when I recently taught this class on the shifting paradigm of the church, what I could hand out that would help people remember things. She suggested taping two new dimes to an index card. It would at least serve as a visual reminder. Anyway, for my input into the new way of doing things in the church, I am coming down to two areas: Personal Ministry (also known as ministry of the laity), and small group worship. I have been on the worship kick for too long now, so I thought I would try to wrap it up today. Then maybe tomorrow, I can spend some time on the personal ministry thing. Over the last couple of weeks I have been looking at the elements of New Testament worship. As we become involved in a large church there are things that can slip through the cracks, like personal contact. I believe that the intimacy of the home church should be added to the benefits of the neighborhood or community church. I think the "home group" or "cell group" should become a "home church." The major difference between them would be that the home church would be inclusive where the home group is exclusive. Say I would like to fellowship with the Dahlin's home group on Friday evening. Right now that's not the way home groups work. They have their little group and that's it. I would hope that a home church would be open to anyone that might want to join for a time of fellowship. Secondly, I would like the home church to function along the Biblical role model for the church, which we have gotten away from for several reasons, mainly orderly fashion and control issues. Anyway, one could focus the home church where it should be. The central focus could and should be the Lord's Supper. "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." Acts 20:7 "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" Heb 10:25 Around that we would add the Word. "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." 1 Timothy 4:13 And the Bible study and discussion would flow out of that. Depending upon the gifts of the group, you could "sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Col 3:16 And, of course, we would pray. "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." 1 Tim 2:8 But the home church would give us a sense of belonging, of fellowship with the body of Christ that can be elusive in a large church. Let me stress, this is addition to, not instead of the "church in a building." I know this is way too wordy, but I am done with it for a while. Peace on you all! May the Lord guide you into a meaningful Worship of Him. Rudy

Personal Ministry

In the early Christian church every believer was called to daily face death for his or her beliefs. The world outside their door was hostile to "the Way" of Jesus Christ. Their own people, the Jews, were many times the most zealous in persecuting them. Each and every believer was entrusted with the good news of Jesus' resurrection and was expected to share this good news in the face of potential death. The professional church worker came much later when the whole Roman Empire became Christian by decree of Constantine in the early 300s. Then they sent missionaries to far away lands to share the gospel and the local lay people were off the hook. Now it was the professionally trained church worker that was expected to do the ministry, all the lay person had to do was send money. Well, guess what! We are once again returning to a time when the world outside our door is openly hostile to the Good News that we have to share. And it is once again time for each Christian to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15 For we "are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that (we) may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9 Each of us has a calling! And each of us are gifted just right for that calling! "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." 1 Cor 12:7 It is important for each one of us to realize that God has blessed us with much and expects much in return. Our response to God's calling in our own responsibility. We can't blame this one on our brother or our church or our Pastor. We are the stuckee. How has God equipped you? How is He calling you to serve Him? May God make His calling for your life abundantly clear! Rudy

An Example and a point

I have this good buddy, who is one of my accountability partners, we'll call him Scott, that has this little idea of a ministry he wants to do. He wants to go to the apartment complex south of our church and put on a BBQ for say three Saturday's in a row. Just be there handing out hot-dogs and hamburgers, building relationships and friendships with the people of the complex. When the time is right he will individually invite people to visit our church. This is an example of a personal ministry that Scott has been called to do. It may lead somewhere and expand but it also may just be three Saturdays and some new relationships. After all, people are won over to the Gospel one person at a time. If each of us had our own personal ministry, just imagine the number of people that would be hearing about the Gospel! Now a point or two. Many professional church workers would pooh-pooh this idea. In the first place, it wasn't their idea. In the second place, it doesn't fit with any of the programs that we currently have going on at the church, and after all shouldn't we do the things we are doing well instead of starting new programs?

Translation: if you want to do ministry, do it my way. I believe the successful church of the future we will revert to the guidance of the past. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-13 The literal interpretation of this phrase from the Greek says: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry," and I remember learning it from the Revised which says: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." Anyway you say it, the primary role of the professional church worker is to train the laity for the ministry that God calls them to. Radical, huh? May the Lord guide you in the way you witness for Him! Rudy

Hannah outgrewed it!

We are in the midst of a hand me down phase at our house. So my little Naomi, who is four, has now gotten "new" clothes and is very proud of them. But for some reason she has to tell everyone that they were the things that Hannah has out grown. It kind of made me think of things that we should out grow. Paul (or maybe Barnabas, whoever wrote Hebrews) says: "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Hebrews 5:11-14 Sometimes I think we who sit in the pews on Sunday Morning think that that is our whole job. Just to warm those pews. Using a war analogy, it would be like the General/Pastor was expected to fight the entire battle while the troops/congregation sits back and watches. We meet once a week just to check in on how the General is doing in battle, and maybe to encourage him, but we have our own lives to live -- we don't have time to fight in the war. And, of course, if the general is not winning the war -- by himself -- we climb all over him to get busy. Does anyone else see how foolish it is that the troops of this Christian army think they aren't part of the battle?? I think the world needs us to outgrow the things of youth and take our rightful place on the battle field. Any takers? Or is God going to have to bring back the draft? May The Lord motivate you to take your rightful place in His army! Rudy

A David Story

I want to tell you a little story, so that you can Praise God! just like we were doing yesterday. I saw David come into church early yesterday morning. He asked someone to take him to the Pastor. Later I found out he simply asked permission to attend church, you see he had been turned away from another church "because of his past." And, of course, our Pastor shared with him that we all have a past. A little later the second Pastor, who had somehow ended up with David brought him to me. I showed him where our college age class would meet after church and assured him that there would be other 22 year olds there -- not just old folks like me. He chose a back seat in church, the one you can bolt from if you don't like what's going on, but as the Spirit would have it a number of my college class sat right in front of him. But, since they came in late, I didn't have the chance to brief them on David. But, as it turned out, I didn't need to. A caring, little old lady, that I'll call Granny, told them that he was praying and looked like he was about their age. The second that church was over they were talking with him. They said that he was "on their heart" the whole service. So David ended up in our class, where I chose to throw all my prepared lesson out and talk about the rooms we find ourselves in, like the disciples were locked in a room of fear. It was a good class with a lot of Scripture references to help us out of our rooms. David shared with us that he was there because an 11 year old boy had told him that he would give up his drugs if David would go to church just one Sunday. Since I knew that David wanted to talk with people his own age, I just mentioned that people would be happy to pray with him after class, if that was what he wanted. I came back to check on them an hour later. David had just left and four college kids were praying for his protection through this next week. One of them had given David her Bible, the one she had all her favorite verses marked in. They shared with me that David had prayed a pray for forgiveness for the past nine years. The angels were rejoicing in heaven over the lost that was found; over the prodigal that had returned! This was personal ministry the way God wants it to work! May He open your eyes to where He needs you next! Rudy

Paul's Wrap Up

I have been writing about personal ministry and worship. Two things that are dear to my heart and two areas where I believe that the church is going to have to do some changing in the future if it is going to continue to be a faithful witness to the good news that has been entrusted to us. As I was reading Romans 12 this morning, I realized again that these very issues were dear to the heart of St. Paul. I am going to let him do the wrap on this series of devotions. I know these words are familiar to us all, so slow down and really read them. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will." "For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouragement, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." Romans 12:1-8 May you serve God according to the grace that he has given you! Rudy

The Bottle Rocket

Some of you may not even know what a bottle rocket is. Actually, they maybe illegal in most places now because of their propensity to start fires. But when I was a kid we used to love the Forth of July because of the fireworks we could buy. The bottle rocket had this foot long little stick on it with this directional explosive on the end. You would stick it down in a coke bottle, then light it and stand back. They would shoot straight up in the air, but it was very difficult to know where they would land. As a kid I don't ever remember starting any fires with them, but I also grew up in Kansas. Now that I am in Colorado and surrounded by big, tall, dry trees, I think I wouldn't just shoot them off just anywhere. I think our church may be characterized like a little boy, who I'll call the Pastor, walking around with a bunch of bottle rockets in his hand. The bottle rockets are us -- the congregation; the laity. This little boy has quite a collection of bottle rockets; he's been saving them for a long time. When the other little boys see his collection they really get jealous. But the little boy is kind of afraid to light his bottle rockets. You see, once he lights them, he no longer can hold them in his hand; once he lights them they will be out of his control. And if they do start a fire somewhere, there might be some explaining to do. Each of those rockets has a little bit of gun powder that their maker put inside them, and until they are lit -- by the little boy -- they won't fulfill the job for which they were made. "It was he who gave some ... to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service." Eph 4:11 Is it time for you to be lit? May the Lord bless you today! Rudy

Please forgive me, (or eatin' crow)

The Pastor that I had in Confirmation (8th grade Bible class) was notorious for getting on the wrong side of me. One of the things that really got to me was when he would lump the whole class together like, "None of you did your homework" or "All of you are being disrespectful and talking too much." It was to one of these generic statements that one time in class I blurted out, "That's not fair, I wasn't doing it." And, of course, that was very disrespectful, so he had to explain to the whole class for my benefit, that even if he says "The whole class" that if you weren't involved you could consider that he wasn't talking to you! Now, at the time I thought the logic was very weak. But, at this particular time in my life I find it is the only logic that I can hide behind. You see, I have been brought to task by several individuals that say that I have been stereotyping, unfairly I might add, "professional church workers" in several of my past devotions. They do agree that in some cases my points may be valid, but for them, my statements were offensive. So first let me say, "Please forgive me." And then let me say, if it doesn't apply to you -- get over it. Oops. That wasn't very tactful, was it? Anyway, there is not one particular "professional church worker" that has "put a burr under my saddle." And believe it or not, I even was one for a while. And many are my dear friends! So anyway, in my future writings I will try to follow Paul's advice and "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." Romans 14:19 And let me assure you that I lift you all up in prayer and love each one of you very dearly! May God's peace surround you when the world would tear you down! Rudy

Inadequate

Inadequacy, lack of self worth, not up to the challenge, fear of failure. I am sure you could add more to the list without even knowing what I am going to talk about. I have probably been successful at more failures than anyone else I know. That may sound like an oxymoron to you, but for us in Christ it really isn't. The world wants to erode our faith; our hope and our trust, but Christ wants to fill us up with these things by hoping and trusting and putting our faith in him, not our own abilities. There was a time when my wife looked at me and said, "Do you know that you haven't had a paycheck in over two years?" That was probably when I realized that I was self employed. But the realization hit me immediately that during those two years all of our needs had been met. Maybe not in the way that we would have done them ourselves, but met nonetheless. Without the hardships that I have gone through in this life, I would not be the same person that I am today. It is like the hands of the Potter have molded me and shaped me just the way He wants me to be. If I could have seen through a crystal ball the life that I was to walk, would I have chosen it? I don't know, I would like to think that I would have submitted to God's will, but I am glad He didn't ask me first. But I have realized that we are not inadequate for the task that the Lord brings to us. In fact, we are uniquely trained by God Himself to complete the very next assignment He has for us. It is simply up to us to trust in His guidance and provision and boldly take the next step of our lives, one after another. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13 May your confidence come from the Lord! Rudy

The Old Time Religion

I went to a very tradition Lutheran Church yesterday to see my niece Confirmed. Afterward, at her reception I had some time to talk with the two Pastors (professional church workers) of the church. I really want to say something in this devotion -- in a constructive way -- about my experience at that church service, but all the thoughts that come to mind are really sad. Yes, there was just the cumbersome stuff, like having to hold three different books just to follow where you were in the service. I grew up in the Lutheran church and I couldn't follow where we were, how in the world could a visitor keep track? There numbers showed exactly zero growth since last year. Their prayer was for the Pastors to have the strength to do ministry -- another congregation of laity told to sit there and give money while the generals do all the fighting. As I sit here, it is just really sad to me that that kind of church service is being repeated all over the country. No life. No joy in the Gospel. Fellowship? I don't think so. I am not just getting on the emotional band wagon. I tried to talk with them about worship styles, suggesting that it might not need to be elevated to the level of doctrine, but all the Pastor would say, "Oh, you might be surprised." And wouldn't have the discussion with a lay person. I want lay people across this country to reclaim their congregations for God and the joy of the Gospel! If you aren't active in a local congregation, why not? If it is not lovable, you make it lovable. If it isn't a place where the Love of the Gospel shines through, you make it a place where God's love is evident to all who walk through the doors. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and don't have a personal ministry in which you are directly involved in sharing the Gospel, WHY NOT?? Are you letting a "professional church worker" tell you it's not your place? Read the Bible! "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood," 1 Peter 2:9; "Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone...for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15; "It was he who gave...pastors to prepare God's people for works of ministry," Eph 4:11; "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season." 2 Timothy 4:2 May He who has begun the good work in you bring it to completion! Rudy

"Pray for me"

We have a little tradition at the Bauer household. After supper and our devotion, we say a round prayer where everybody gets a chance. It goes from youngest to oldest, so I get to end it. Naomi is my youngest so she starts it. Lately she has been running a little temperature so, last night, each of the prayers of the other family members including a request for healing for Naomi. When it came my turn to pray, I just said something to the effect that I agree with all the other prayers and then started adding my own petitions. Before I was done, though, little Naomi had walked around the table and was gently tugging on my shirt sleeve. I paused for a moment and she whispered, "and that Naomi would feel better." So I got the hint and actually said the words so that not only God but Naomi would know that I was praying for her. It feels good when we know someone is praying for us. Even nonbelievers, at times of crisis in their lives will usually welcome the phrase from believers, "I'll pray for you." I think we should tell people more often that we are praying for them, and then, of course, do it. Our righteousness that is gained through Christ makes every Christian man and woman's prayer a powerful one. "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16 Why leave a mighty power tool of God on the shelf and try to do these things all by our own might? We have a direct line to the Almighty Father, Creator of the Universe, the Ultimate CEO. No waiting, no secretary to screen our calls. Just a loving Father waiting for us to ask. May your prayers be powerful and effective in shaping our world! Rudy

Thy will be done.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of you Father." Matthew 10:29 Let me tell you a little story that brought this verse to mind yesterday. I was walking in the forest near my house when I heard this high pitched squealing. I looked and saw a magpie (those black and white birds that most people find obnoxious) pecking at something in his claws. He was on the ground so I thought maybe something needed rescuing. So I shoed the bird away and found this little, I mean fit in the palm of your hand little, bunny. The bunny was dazed from being pecked on by this magpie, but otherwise didn't seem to be hurt. Holding it my hand I looked around for a nest, but found nothing but the magpie watching me from a tree. I decided that I must be the bunny's helper. I am proud to report that, at least this morning the bunny is alive and doing well. The evil in this world that results from our sin grieves the heart of our Loving Father. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," yet we keep on living as if our will is the right and just thing to do. Tomorrow is the National Day of Prayer. This is a time for all Christians in our great country to realign our will with the Father's. It is a time for us to set our petitions before the Father on behalf of the weak and helpless. It is a time for us to Praise the Creator of the Universe for loving us so much that He has kept us from "falling to the ground." It is time to thank Him for sending His Son to be our help when the world seems to be pecking us to death. It is a time for us to publicly show that we are a praying nation, one nation under God. Please participate in the National Day of Prayer, for the sake of the Father's will. May he guide your steps to do His will. Rudy

Snow on May 3rd

When I was a young lad in Kansas, my Momma used to say that 'April showers brought May flowers.' And indeed, I remember using fresh blooms of Lilac for our May day baskets that we would hang on a door knob, ring the bell and run. But in Colorado, literally no day is safe from the potential of snow fall. And as I look out the door this morning, I can tell that the National Day of Prayer celebration at our local ball stadium is going to be a chilly one. We have many traditions in our lives that mold our daily routine. I remember reading that the Native Americans thought that the great spirit was in battle with someone to bring back summer. They didn't actually know who would win in the spring, so they lived with the potential of perpetual winter. No matter how good, or bad, our traditions may be, they are only man made things. They are not Scripture and they are not doctrine. No matter how we might like a particular worship style, it is not to be elevated to the level of doctrine. Now I agree that the elements of worship have been prescribed by Scripture, and where we have that guidance we should follow it. But how we pull it off shouldn't be a dividing point for Christians. Paul says to the Corinthians, "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?" 1 Cor 3:3 He tells them that since they are still worldly that they are not ready for solid food, only milk. Today, in your towns across America, many Christians will not participate in the National Day of Prayer community celebrations because of these petty differences. That's sad. Instead we should come together in unity and Praise our Living God! And if you are in Colorado Springs -- bring a blanket! May God's Perfect Peace be found in Unity of His believers!

Rudy

The Journey

Jason, my college age son, is coming home today. I will be writing less over the summer, although, I don't feel that I can quit all together. The interaction I get from you refines me, molds me and helps me grow. I am not the man that I once was, nor am I what God wants me to be, but the journey is the key. Someday each of us will reach the destination and hear Jesus, our brother say, "Well, done, my good and faithful servant." But He will be talking about the journey. Our Journey. Paul says a few things about the journey. "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." 1 Cor 4:2 and "Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is." Eph 5:15-17I imagine if Paul were versed in the vernacular of my day, he would say, "Go for it!" It is kind of like four wheeling in sand or mud. If you timidly drive out into the sand you will bog down and get stuck. On the other hand there is a real benefit to speed and high RPMs. True, you may still get stuck, but it will not be for a lack of trying. And your odds of getting through are much better. And we who have the "trust" must use it; we must prove faithful! There is a lost and dying world bogged down in the quicksand of life waiting for you to reach out with your life rope of Jesus. Folks, that happens on the Journey. If you wait till the end you're too late. You'll save yourself, but the rest of the world will go to heck. For my own strength, I would love to hear your stories about your journey. If you write, let me know if I can pass the stories on to others or if they are just for me. Either way, I would enjoy hearing from each one of you. May the Lord bless you on your Journey! Rudy

Cuddle Time

Last night must have been bad dream night in the Bauer household. First Noah, my 6 year old, came to bed and started swinging his arms around, which motivated me to seek my Laziboy in the Living Room. But then it wasn't long before Noah followed me there and wanted to be in my lap. I told him he would have to be happy with the couch if he wanted to be near me. So the spots were all taken when Naomi, my 4 year old came looking for me. So I let her crawl up into my lap. Since I couldn't sleep well, I got some quality time in prayer. It was kind of like I crawled up into the lap of my Father and had a little cuddle time. When the troubles of the day threaten to overwhelm us and the bad dreams of reality crowd our vision, it's time that we seek out our Father and see if there is room in His lap. You know, there always is. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ... And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ... in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Romans 8:15, 28, 37 Have you been putting off the quality cuddle time with the Father? I know right now that I am glad my kids had trouble sleeping last night, because it let me catch up on something that I desperately needed and need every day. How else can we face this "vale of tears?" It is only safely tucked away in the Father's lap that I want to face this world. May the Loving arms of Our Father hold you and comfort you! Rudy

Busted!

For those of you that have been with me a while, you'll remember that about a year ago, many of my devos focused on Noah, my very active preschooler. This year, he has been in Kindergarten and has really been doing well. Someone, however, must have told him about the saying 'boys will be boys.' Because yesterday, he and four other classmates were suspended for fighting on the playground. Many things have changed in this world since I was in Kindergarten; especially since the Columbine shootings of two years ago. We now have a "zero tolerance" school system that I know I would have never made it through. The result will be that borderline kids will no longer have a chance of making it through the system. They will be labeled and sent down the wrong road. So, can I tie this to the Word? I think it is very obvious that the split between the sacred and the secular is widening. St. Paul said that "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." 1 Cor 8:1 It is easy for me at least to see, that if you remove all aspects of God from public school, that love and compassion are the causalities. Knowledge and wisdom, without love, are hollow. We are called to reinsert that love into the system. Of course, my immediate reaction is to pull Noah out of the system, and if it was just Noah I was thinking about, I think that would be the right reaction. But if every Christian pulls out of the world, what kind of world would it be? We are called to be salt and light in difficult situations. And the boundary between knowing when to flee and when to stay and fight is always a difficult call. And I guess, I need to work a little harder with Noah on the words of our loving Savior and downplay the right hook thing. May he guide you as you season this world with His light! Rudy

The Harder Sacrifice

You know, Mother's day is kind of the ultimate holiday. First off, everybody has a mother, so it is kind of one of those days that we all at least think about. But, I think the true depth of what the day should mean is lost in the triviality of the society we live in. I was thinking about the verse when Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 I realized several things. First, there is not a Mother I know of that would not lay down her life for their children, if they were called to do so. That love between a Mother and child seems supernaturally strong. But, the really big thing that I realized is that most aren't called upon to make the sacrifice this verse is talking about, but they really make it in another, actually more painful way. You see, Mothers lay down their lives for their children by continuing to live! Their everyday existence is a constant laying down of their lives. True motherhood is a profession that you could not pay anyone to do. It is only out of love that anyone could find the strength to fulfill the role that mothers are called to fill. From diapers, to school suspensions, to wedding plans, it takes that supernatural, God provided love, for a mother to even find the strength to continue to daily lay down her life for her children. I guess I want to thank my mother and my wife for the extreme, life long sacrifice that they have made for the sake of their children. And I want to thank God for giving Mothers everywhere the strength to make the ultimate sacrifice and LIVE for their children! May the Lord bless you in your walk as you seek to serve Him today! Rudy

It must be springtime.

In Colorado, we usually have one week of springtime, sandwiched right between winter and summer. Both Noah and I are feeling it. For Noah it came out yesterday in the morning recess, even before he had started school. So he had "in school suspension" all morning. The only thing I could tell his teacher was that it must be the springtime. We have had such a good year, and now all of a sudden things aren't going well. I can sympathize with Noah. It seems like in my life I do well for so long only to fall off the wagon, so to speak. It really is hard for me to discipline Noah, because, I am not far away from where he is. Have you ever felt like you were having "symbolic time out" from God? I have found in the past that the word "Discipline" is one that most people do not like to use from a God perspective. But both Solomon and the writer of Hebrews use it. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Heb 12:5-7 He goes on to say that every son receives discipline and that it is really a mark that we are true sons of the Father. Hardship can get us down or we can learn from it, grow from it, get tougher because of it. I know also that if Noah is fighting my discipline it sometimes gets harder and longer. But if he shows a willing heart, it can sometimes get shorter. Maybe it will help, in times of hardship, if we ask the Father what He wants us to learn. May God grant you peace as you try to discern His will in your daily walk! Rudy

The Christian Disciplines

Yesterday, I talked about the kind of discipline that the Lord does for us when He wants to mold and shape us. How about today we talk about the kind of discipline that we should put upon ourselves? You know these are things like daily Bible reading; being consistent. It's what Paul talks about when he tells us to run the race with the intent to win. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." 1 Cor 9:24 I know that like many of you I should be out running or at least walking each morning, because the body is the Lord's temple and we should take care of it; but not to the exclusion of our spirit. It should also be in training, and it's training should take precedence. Yesterday, we had to find some baby pictures of Zachary for his High school graduation poster. And Dena, my lovely wife just had to show me a picture of a vacation at the beach where my belly was just a tad smaller than it is now. But I do believe that I am in better spiritual shape now than I was then. But I know that I shouldn't ignore either one. How many of you are getting enough spiritual exercise? I think that there are areas that we all can improve upon. More quality time in prayer. More intentional Bible study. How about TV abstinence? I think that could qualify as a spiritual discipline. Committed time in Christian Fellowship. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Heb 12:1 May God give you strength to train! Rudy

Promises

Some of you know Sabrina. She is 24 and came to live with us a year ago now, when some of her plans didn't work out the way she thought they would. She was tired and hurt and all I did was give her a soft landing. Last night Joe proposed and she is feeling different about God's promises than she was a year ago. By the way they have already set the date of July 15 for their wedding. Just yesterday, I got an email that said that "not all of God's promises are for us." Actually, the person emailing me was asking if that statement was true. I find it hard to respond to such a blanket statement, but I don't think that we can pick and choose, saying that some are for us and others are not. The end of that road is not a pretty one. Let us take just one of the better but tougher promises and talk about it. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 This one applies to every Christian. God can and does work good out of everything that life can throw at us. Many times it is not at all on our time table. And many times we find ourselves stranded at a lonely place in life, just like Sabrina found herself one year ago. Many times our concept of good isn't quite in line with God's concept, either. Some times an attitude adjustment is in order. As an example, if Paul had not found himself in prison for so many years how would he have found the time to write all those books that we find so valuable today? Paul said he had found the secret to being content in good times or in want. That secret is trust. Trust that the promise of God is true. That He is working through every situation for our good! Once that trust is there, we truly can rejoice in all situations, and then enjoy the show and watch how God works for our good, many times against supernatural odds. May the Lord show you His hand in your life! Rudy

Comforting Words

I collect a number of things; that is the way a pack rat is happy. One thing I collect is Bibles. Not only new ones, but old ones, too. My son recently found a very large volume of Scripture that was published in 1884. It, unfortunately was stored in unfavorable conditions through much of its past and is literally falling apart. I am in the process of trying to salvage some of its prettier pages. I reread the 23rd Psalm last night in the "Authorized Version." This version is basically an update of the King James version of 1611. It was commissioned by the House of Convocation of the province of Canterbury around 1856 and finished in 1884. When this Bible was published the "Authorized Version" was THE version. Of course, it was still the version when I first started learning Bible passages. Maybe that is why the words of the 23rd Psalm in the "AV" are so comforting to me. Here presented for your reading enjoyment are the words of the 23rd Psalm in the Authorized Version. PSALM XXIII David's confidence in God's Grace. A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me besides the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. May the words of a sheep herder bring comfort to you as they have to me. Rudy

Just a tad more on Promises

Just a few days ago I mentioned a person who had emailed me asking if all of God's promises were for all of God's people. I am still struggling with the answer, but, it does seem to me that Paul directly talks to this issue in the first chapter of 2nd Corinthians. I would encourage all of you to read the whole chapter, but here are the highlights. First, Paul talks about how great his sufferings have been. "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ... We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." 2 Cor 1:5,8 Then Paul tells us why this happened. "But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us." 2 Cor 1:9,10 Then as if Paul had been asked the same question about God's promises he continues, "For no matter how many promises God has made they are "Yes" in Christ." 2 Cor 1:20 So when we look at our lives and say, "surely God's promises aren't available to me, look how pitiful my life is!" Or something to that effect, I think we need to reread 2 Cor Chapter 1. For in Christ all of God's promises are "Yes" to each one of us! What we have to do is look at our life through the lens of the Holy Spirit. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." 2 Cor 4:8 Does God promise us a life without hardship? NO WAY! Does He promise that He will keep us from being crushed? YOU BET! Every promise of God for us has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is our all in all! He is our strength to accomplish all things! He is our ability to endure life's hardships! May the Spirit open your eyes to the world of promises around us! Rudy

Relationships

I think I am going to whine just a little bit. So, for all of you who don't enjoy my whining, I give you permission to tune out. Relationships are the very core of our Christian beliefs. When tested by Jesus an expert in the law summed it up this way. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27 Not only was the expert in the law quoting the Old Testament, but Jesus also confirmed that he answered the question correctly. So I ask you, what is the opposite of this command? The only thing I can come up with is love of self. And love of self is the thing that this society seems to put on a pedestal and worship. The problem is we are buying into it! Let me start with the "professional church worker." Yes, they are overworked, as is the majority of this society. It's a way that Satan gets us to agree with, "We deserve a break today." But I see in many of them that the relationships that should grow from their heart is instead a duty of their job. So all of a sudden it's OK to work hard on the paperwork, but then ignore the relationships because they've already put in too many hours this week. Or how about the opposite. How about all of us who put the value of our job above the needs of the relationships around us? "The job" is more important than your best friend's wedding. Or, the Sunday morning soccer tournament is more important than our relationship with God. Am I qualified to throw this first stone. Absolutely not! But, at least I am aware of it. It seems to me that this society is spinning out of control. Computer games have replaced real friendships. The affair of the job has replaced the marriage at home. The pursuit of the leisure has replaced the relationship with our Almighty Creator. It is definitely out of control and I am afraid it is on a self destruct course. Are you about to burn up? The only way to change this spiral is one relationship at a time. Good luck. I'll be praying for us. May the Lord direct your relationships! Rudy

Distractibility

Paul writes in 2 Cor 4:4, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Distractibility is my hall mark. Having been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, (which I believe is neither a "deficit" or a "disorder" but rather the "hunter" trait) I am always in search of a new way to do things. My original motivation to do something, say share the gospel with college age students, may get all sidetracked because I decided to write a devo each morning, or it may actually enhance the goal. But I have to stop and evaluate. For instance, one idea that didn't prove worthy of deployment was buying a boat so that I could have a "Thursday family day on the lake" complete with Bible study and campfire. It turned out to be a tad too worldly. Now assume I apply that little thinking to yesterday's discussion about relationships. Most people that get active in ministry, whether lay people or professional church workers, do so because they truly want to change hearts. They truly care if a person is going to die without the knowledge of Jesus. Then somewhere along the way, Satan tries his worldly tricks on us. He hammers us hard, because the love of the gospel is his only true enemy. Sometimes we may slip a little. We may decide that the boat is worth buying, because we really want a boat and after all, I want to use it for ministry. Or, we may think that the paperwork really is that important; after all it's part of ministry, and someone has to do it. Once Satan gets you redirected away from sharing the love of Christ you're working on his team. It doesn't matter how he redirects you; love, anger, lust, busywork, financial difficulties, or lots of money; if he gets you, then lives aren't touched with the gospel. We must always turn back to the Word and to prayer and keep ourselves focused on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith! May God direct your steps and keep them from being distracted! Rudy

Restoration

Have you ever been hurt by anyone? I am sure we can all say a big "Yes" to that one. This is a world of pain. The prayer of Jabez ends with a line that asks God not to let us cause pain to anyone. The longer I have been adding that to my daily prayers, the more I realize the amount of pain that I have caused. Even when we don't intend to cause pain, we still do. As a young 6th grader I was growing up in Kansas and would often go with my older sister to the river. (In Kansas, it is called the Ar-Kansas River.) One day I ran a corn stalk up through the arch of my bare foot. Like Tom Sawyer, I don't think I wore shoes except on Sundays. Anyway, a boyfriend of my sister thought he had the latest medical technology and applied first aid of nasty, stinking river bottom mud directly to this puncture wound. I spent an extra six weeks on crutches while they drew the mud out with a poultice. Now, I don't think the boyfriend meant to do me harm. However, his ignorance was only superseded by his pride. How often are we causing pain from our ignorance? How often, do careless words cut deep and leave a festering mud in the wound? We are called to offer the restoration that comes with being a new creation in Christ. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" 2 Cor 5:18 We are to be binding up the wounds, not causing them to go deeper or to fester longer. We are called to be knowledgeable enough to offer the Words of restoration. To restore. To bring people back into a relationship with the loving Father. In each person you meet today you will either bind up the wounds and help them in the restoration process or you will stick mud in their wound and give them weeks more of rehabilitation. Which will it be? As you and I go out into this world today, we are not a neutral force. We will either be actively involved in the ministry of reconciliation that God has called us to, or we'll be mud slingers. May God guide you to a wound that needs care today! Rudy

Comforted

Paul was having a bad day: "For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn -- conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." 2 Cor 7:5,6 There are days that we seem to be "harassed at every turn," isn't there? Each of us has to bear with our own particular hassles, and there are times when it seems that there is no help; no particular one to turn to. I have noticed at times like these in my life that there is always a "ray of sunshine." Something even just as small as a smile from someone or even as big as your tax return coming in the mail. Whatever it is "God comforts the downcast." You'll notice in Paul's case the ray of sunshine was the coming of a dear friend, Titus. Not only that, but Titus brought news from the Corinthians. News that helped Paul's spirit. Friendship and good news are the things that can brighten any day. Each of us can be a friend, if we slow down long enough to do it. Each of us can tell the Good News, if it is high enough on our prioritized "to do" list. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:15 As we walk through this day we can choose to bring with us a "ray of Sonshine" or a "storm cloud." I know way too often I let my troubles hang around with me like a thunder head about to burst out over everyone around me. With a little intentional thought, each of us can change the weather around us. Enjoy your day and enjoy your long weekend. May the Lord bless you with good weather! Rudy

Arsenal

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Cor 10:3-5 Can you imagine if we really had the ability to take each thought we have and set it in front of Jesus and ask Him what He thinks about it before we act on it? That indeed would be a powerful weapon for living! It would be as if, Noah, my little 6 year old rambunctious kindergartner, would think as he was about to take a swing at another kid on the play ground, "What would Jesus want me to do?" For if he truly could stop and think before he acted, I would not be getting the calls from the principal's office. How many of us have short circuited that same thought process? If, indeed, we took the time to ask ourselves what Jesus thought about a particular situation, it would often change the way we responded. But I am afraid that we have trained ourselves out of asking what Jesus would think, because we want to do what we want to do. We want to be our own masters. But yet it is not until we get past the slavery of our own self that we can truly live. In taking each thought captive to Jesus we can destroy the strongholds that keep each one of us in prison. One by one we can tear the walls down. We can take the sin of materialism or lust or selfishness or any other and one thought at a time literally tear it to pieces. We have weapons of Power! The very mind of Christ is available to us to tear down our prisons! Why use a pop gun when we can Nuke 'em? May the Power of Christ be yours today! Rudy

Pride and logic

"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Cor 12:10 What kind of logic is that? Have you every tried to boast of your weakness so that God might receive the glory instead of you? The world; even the Christian world; thinks that is stupid. We -- this country, you, me; all of us -- are obsessed with power. We love fast cars. We love the power that comes with money. We love the ability to buy what we want when we want it; that's why credit is such a seductive tool of Satan. We love teaching the Word with wisdom and strength, so that all in the class will be impressed with our knowledge of Scripture. We love being really good at something, striving to be the best. We love a winning football team. We just love to be on top of our profession; or our class; or anything else we are involved in. How can we, especially in this society, be able to join Paul in delighting in our weaknesses? I don't even want people to know my weaknesses, let alone delight in them! So where truly does our strength come from to live out our lives. From our own confidence in ourselves to master the day or from Christ? At least for me this is a daily struggle. I try to give it all over to God, and then I find myself reaching out and taking it back; not being happy with God's timing or His approach or whatever. On at least two occasions in my life I have worked really hard on "big deals" only to finally say, when it looks like the whole thing will never work, "Lord, I give up." Low and behold, the very next thing you know the thing comes together. Now it wouldn't have worked without my efforts up front, so I am not advocating laziness, but I am advocating trusting in God from the outset and not relying on our own understanding. There is no doubt that we will not perfect this trait while here in this world, but we do need to keep trying. I am still not sure that I want to boast of my weaknesses. Maybe tomorrow. May the Lord's peace and comfort guide you today and always. Rudy

Upon this we can agree

This past week has taken me through many graduations. Six of our College class graduated from the Air Force Academy last Wednesday. Friday, my second youngest graduated from Kindergarten. Saturday, my second oldest graduated from High School. Today, my pivot boy graduates from Middle school. For some reason my thoughts have turned to new beginnings. Whenever we go out into the world there are new relationships to be made. Many times we focus on what makes us different. Instead I would propose to you that we should look at the one thing upon which we can agree with a large number of the people that we will come in contact with. That Jesus Christ is Lord! At first, at least, just look for this unifying bond. Allow it to form friendships that are based on this central reality of all of Creation. Paul was a new comer to the group of Apostles and Jesus gave him an unpopular ministry to the Gentiles. He needed to find a common bond with the other guys and this is what he settled on: "We...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." Gal 3:16 It is a simple Truth with the power to change the world. As we grow in our relationships we can begin to explore the other deep truths that we love to discuss, like the real presence in communion and infant/believers baptism. But in the beginning, and really though out the relationship, be resolved to Glory in the belief that Jesus Christ is our Savior. It is the cornerstone of our faith and of our relationships! May God guide all of you that are taking on new beginnings! Rudy

Moody

I have been fighting the "moody" lately. Sometimes I wish we men could have it scheduled for us, know it was coming and just deal with it. Even though it doesn't follow a cycle it is still disruptive and a pain to live with. Intellectually I know that my circumstances should not dictate how I feel or that the actions of other people should not screw up my day, but for some reason the intellect is not as strong as the emotions, at least on some days. I imagine I am the only one in the world that has problems with a bad attitude, so if you've never had one you can skip to the blessing. But if attitudes are sometimes a part of your day, it would be good for you to remember that Jesus loves you in spite of yourself. There is nothing you do that is going to surprise Him. He already paid the price for every screwup. Yours, mine, and all of humanity. He doesn't have to pay it again and neither do we. So when you find yourself in a situation that threatens your mood, remember the secret that Paul shared with us. "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Phil 4:12-13 Jesus is our strength to deal with everything without turning our mood into something of a scourge capable of blotting out life as we know it. And I am not talking about just touching us on the surface. I mean really not letting it get to us at any level. Paul says, and intellectually at least I believe it, we can be CONTENT in all situations. That's because we know those situations are in the hands of our loving Savior; who already knows the worst about us and chose to die for us anyway! Thank you Jesus! What a bud! May the closeness of your Friend be a constant comfort! Rudy

Exciting Times

Literally for over 20 years I have had the desire in me to develop a Christian Family Resort and Retreat Center that would offer the same kind of fun for families that summer camp offers for kids. In the mid 80's I called it the "Ktisma Center" which was a Greek word that meant all of God's creation was good. I even had the backing of Lutheran Brotherhood, but all I got from God was "wait." But last night I actually was able to get the most beautiful piece of property under contract. It is the last undeveloped hot springs in the whole State of Colorado, has a climbing cliff, access to the Collegiate Range, close to skiing and is a beautiful hidden valley. I think this is the time. I think God is no longer saying "wait." But I still could be wrong. Paul tells us, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we will see face to face. Now I know in part; then I will know fully, even as I am fully known." 1 Cor 13:12 It won't be until heaven that we will be absolutely sure of God's will. Until then we must walk by faith. If we would be able to know for sure there would be no reason for trust, and in this world trust in Our Lord is what makes us different from the rest of the world. Yes, this is a most exciting time for me, because I think the desire of my heart is about to unfold. I will walk this path. But if the Lord says "wait" again I will wait and know that I did my best in trying to follow His will. After we pray then there is just trust. To hesitate is human. To plow forward based on trust in something you can't see is foolishness to the world. But I believe it is pleasing to God. May He direct your steps and increase your faith! Rudy PS. I will need tremendous amounts of help with this project, so if any of you are "tugged" by the concept please join me!

"To Become"

My little Noah, who is now a big man of 6, sometimes comes out with things that make me think. As I was helping him with his bath yesterday before church, I made some comment that soon he would be able to do his bath all by himself. You could see the wheels start turning, so I said that I would still help him with his hair for a while if he wanted me to. Then he said, "So first I learn how to do my own bath, then wash my hair, then I can get married." After I stopped laughing, I explained that there may be a few more steps in the process; before the marriage day anyway. I am sure that his thought process was influenced by the fact that his oldest brother, Jason, has scheduled his wedding on New Year's Eve of this year. Many times we want to skip steps in the development process that God wants to take us through. Many times we see someone who has attained what we think we want and just decided to jump right to that place. But I think the Master Potter has smoothing and molding that may still have to come. Paul says to the Gentiles in Ephesus, "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Eph 2:22 When my oldest, Jason was Noah's age I remember my Mother, "Granny," telling me to be patient, that God wasn't finished with him yet. Well, as a parent I have become more patient -- good thing for Noah -- but I still am sometimes not willing to wait for God to get me where I want to be. After all the molding process can be painful at times. But I am excited when I get little glimpses into the where He is taking me! May each of us have the patience to allow the building process to continue. Rudy

Why?

Paul writes, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" Eph 3:20

So I ask you, why? Why do we limit God? Let's assume, for just a moment that your earthly father is quite wealthy. You know that he loves you unconditionally and is always willing to make time for you. Who of us wouldn't go to him if we had a difficulty that he could help with. Other than the wealthy part, I hope that my kids will come to me whenever I can help them, and actually I hope they come to me when they don't need help, too, just to spend time with their dear old pop. Now if I have those kind of desires, can't you just imagine how the Most Perfect Father in all of time would desire us to come to Him both in times of need and in times of plenty. As far as I can tell from my non Greek background, the original text that is translated "immeasurably" says literally "way above over and beyond." This Father, Our Father, is the very one "who created all things!" (Eph 3:9) If you want to talk about knowing someone who has connections -- this Guy is it! And He is willing to give us way over and beyond all that we ask or imagine! So why don't we ask? Why don't we imagine? Could it be that we really don't believe these words? Or do we think they were just for another time? Paul even answers that one: "throughout all generations for ever and ever." So for the sake of Jesus Christ and that people may know Him, ask that the Father may use you way over and beyond what you can even imagine. When you get there, give me a call! May the Lord bless you and keep you and use you in a mighty way! Rudy

Summer Timing

This summer is so scheduled, I feel like it is almost over before it begins. I know that isn't true, but... This very next week on Monday I plan an investigative trip over to the Wuanita Hot Springs piece that I wrote about in "Exciting Times." I don't think I be writing for a while, but one may pop out every now and then. I would like any of you who could join us next week at the hot springs to seriously consider coming over. I could use you as activity in the video that I am going to take. You could be extras in an off Hollywood production! Seriously, I am excited about this project: a family ministry center, deep in the Rockies at a wonderful hot springs, so I would love all of your prayers for God's will to be done. Even though this isn't really a devo, I did have a verse: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs." Eph 4:29 Sabrina always asks me, when I get a little to rough on her, "Now, is that building me up?" It's a good question; one that we should ask ourselves before we open our mouths! Peace on you all. And if any one wants a few days in the mountains, email me or call me (719-460-0404) and we can discuss the details. Rudy

Toasted

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the worst." 1 Timothy 1:15 Yesterday at the pool I forgot a basic fact: If you lay out in the sun without sunscreen, you get sunburned. You see I thought I was OK because there are certain parts of my body that are very tan. We here in the West love to call it a "farmers tan." But the other parts that were exposed when I donned my swimming suit for about the first time this summer were not as protected. So I was radiating the stored energy of the sun last night and the shower wasn't quite as comfortable this morning. There are basic truths in this Created Universe. Ones that if you ignore doesn't change their truth. Paul reminds Timothy of the most important basic Truth. Christ died for sinners. Of which you and I are listed among. If we are not saved by Jesus Christ that very sin has the power to separate us from God for all eternity. Just because we don't believe it or chose to ignore it will not keep us from getting burnt! It is TRUTH! Our perception of it doesn't change it. All we can do is accept it and live by it. Our God is an awesome God that gave us a free gift of protection from that sin. We must not ignore the dangers of being caught without it. It is the Power of God for our salvation. Many of us are past the point where our Mommy remind us to put on sunscreen. As we walk this world on our own, it is very important that we don't forget to heed our Daddy's advice: Jesus Saves! Don't leave home without Him! May our Father guide you into all Truth! Rudy

Convergence

I have this problem with my schedule. One of the things that bothers me most is to have people waiting on me to show up. I don't like to be late. I try very hard to write things down in my daytimer so that I will remember them and not leave someone hanging. But convergence happens this way. I have something on my schedule -- I know about it, haven't forgotten it or anything. Then there is this other thing happening, usually something big, that everyone knows about. I know about it, too. It's just that I don't realize that both of these things are scheduled for the same time slot in my life. Yesterday: Number 1 was on my schedule, my Bible study/accountability group. Number 2 what we all knew about and planned for, my son's birthday party. 4:30 in the afternoon: Convergence. That was the point in time that I realized I had committed to be two places at one time. (Sorry guys!) There was another convergence, of sorts, that happened at the cross. The devil thought that he had scheduled the total annihilation of the human race. He thought he was going to the cross for a victory celebration. When he got there he found out that Jesus and His Almighty Father had another meeting in mind. A day of reckoning. The time in all of history when the debt for all of sin whether past or future would be paid in full. The time was right. The time had been on God's daytimer since the beginning of all time. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time." 2 Timothy 2:5-6 It is like that one pivotal moment in time is the convergence of all time -- for without it we would be lost, but with it we have all of eternity to celebrate! May God bless you with the gift of time today. Rudy

Legalism Vs Grace

How do you run your life? What is the balance between legalism versus Grace? Let me give you an example. In reading first Timothy, where Paul gives direction to choosing an overseer, he says that they should not be prone to drunkenness. Our church doesn't even address this when we choose our elders. My friend's church tells their elders not to drink at all and even goes to their work place to check them out. Personally, I try to live up to the Biblical standards of a good life, but I am really glad there is no one following me to check me out. Other than Jesus, of course, He and I talk often about my way of life. I think if we judge, especially if we haven't been given the permission to, like in an accountability relationship, we have the real danger of trashing on a Christian brother. But yet, we are told "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Gal 6:1 I think this is a fine line, one that too many of us, myself included, are willing to jump across at even the hint of something wrong in our brother's life. We should always balance it with this direction: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Mat 7:3 If Jesus tells us not to judge (Mat 7:1) I find it very difficult to rush in and point fingers. I pray that God may give each one of us the proper balance on this issue of life! May God our Almighty Father bless you today! Rudy

Money, Money, Money

Paul talks a lot about money in 1 Timothy. Much of it is painful. I left a meeting at our church last night that was talking about money. It was getting painful, but that wasn't the reason I left. This week is VBS at our church and the morning comes early. I left just so my family would have the energy to do the ministry at VBS that I think God has called us to. You see, I think one of Satan's great ploys is to distract. His attack is not head on, it's this side ways attack that many of us don't recognize. And if he can get us distracted from doing the ministry that God has called us to, he puts a mark up on his board for a job well done. And much of the time money is the tool he uses to distract us. How many of you would classify yourselves as "tight?" Or maybe "frugal?" Instead Paul says that we shouldn't be a "lover of money." He even tells us that we should always be able to go to family member when we need help. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Timothy 5:8 I bet there is many a "frugal" person who would rather not read that verse! Being generous and giving is one way we can show that our heart is in the right place. Today I think "high yield CDs" equal "bigger barns." (Luke 12:18) It has been said that the man who built those bigger barns should have rather stored that extra harvest in the bellies of the poor. But Satan loves to distract. And he knows that our pocketbook gets our attention. May God bless you with a clear focus on Ministry! Rudy

Holy Man of God

We should each strive to be this right? We should each strive to be a holy man or woman of God. So what are the steps in that striving? There are many and maybe you guys out there can mail me a few you think of and I will add them to a future email. But as I was doing my Bible reading for this morning, 1 Timothy 6, I realized that you can either read the Bible or you can read it and make it your own. You can decide that the precepts in the Bible are really there for you. I know Paul is writing to Timothy, but when you read these words: "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith." 6:11-12 -- when you read these words you can realize that they are talking to you not just Tim or not just your Pastor. They need to take root in our heart and grow, nourished from the spring of everlasting life that is welling up in side of us because of the dwelling in our heart of Christ our Savior. Christianity isn't a dead, do-nothing faith. In fact, there are more seeds contained in Scripture than any one man could get planted in his heart in a life time. We daily need to search the Word for those nuggets of Truth and make them our own. By meditating on God's Word "day and night" we will become "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither." (Ps 1:3) Then, the psalmist says, "whatever we do will prosper." Might I encourage each of you to increase the time you spend in the Word each day? Plant your seeds and water them and see what the Lord sprouts! May your roots be watered well today! Rudy

The Going Forth

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." 2 Timothy 2:2 Yesterday we celebrated the wedding of Joe and Sabrina. Two people that met in my college age Bible class. Sabrina came to live with me just 13 months ago and now she and Joe have gone forth. Yes, they have gone forth to start a new life together; but more importantly they have gone forth with the vision to spread the Good News of the Salvation offered by Jesus Christ to the world! They are equipped. They not only have a good grasp of Scripture, they also have the desire to continue to learn about what God has done for them and what He has planned for their lives. Out of my class this summer there are four such couples getting married and going forth. If I ever saw an answer to the "expand my territory" part of the Jabez pray it is this. These people coming out of this class and being stationed all over the country are an outreach force with amazing potential. They are well armed and have a passion to tell people about Jesus. Yes, it is hard to let them go, but Wow! what a sending! They are like well aimed bullets piecing the world for Christ. And lest anyone think that I am boasting -- all I did was show up. And you know, that wasn't even my doing. It was all God. What a great and powerful God we have! I would urge each one of you to present yourselves to God as a living sacrifice and watch what He has in store for you. It is awesome and exciting! May God bless you today and forevermore! Rudy

You think you've got it hard?

No, I am not going to tell you about my troubles. But, we all have them, don't we. Many times, sitting listening to another Christian's story I am struck by how it just doesn't seem fair. God is on our side, right? And He is the most Awesome Power in the Universe, right? So why doesn't he fix some of this stuff that is going on? In my reading today I was struck anew by a promise that Paul writes to Timothy. It is not one that we really like to dwell on. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim 3:12) Not really one of those promises we like to hang our hat on, is it? So, why? Could it be that God doesn't want us too comfortable down here? Could it be that this really isn't our home. From that perspective, I rejoice in the joy that He does bless us with in our brief sojourn here below. Like the sweetness of relationships that is so real that it makes me feel truly alive. Or like when my children were born, my spirit soared as if I had the very wings of eagles. How truly precious that Grace did seem the hour I first believed. And to think that the beauty of this earth is just a shadow of what is laid up for us in heaven! And this frail body will be replaced by the newer model, without all the recall notices. The glimpses of heaven that we get here on earth allows me to hope. It allows me to reach out to a gracious God, share my struggles with Him and draws me closer to Him -- not the opposite. Every time He rescues me from an earthly situation, it gives me hope. Thanks be to God for my struggles! May He be your every help in time of trouble. Rudy

(Eager) Dirty Videos

I once had a coworker receive a package in the mail while I happened to be standing next to him. He turned around and looked at me and said something like, "All right! I know what these are, the latest dirty videos from my friend in Georgia." He was absolutely "eager" to get home and have a good time. What are you "eager" for? If you had to tell your Christian buddy about it would you be proud? This particular coworker didn't give a rip what anyone thought. At least he was firm in his convictions. Paul tells Titus that Jesus came to redeem us from the wicked side of life and to give us a different eagerness. "Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Titus 2:14 There is no doubt that Satan is refining his technology. Now if it is dirty videos that you want, you don't have to wait for the mail to deliver them. In fact, technology allow us to live two separate lives if that's what we want and people don't even have to know. But our "eagerness" should be in a different direction. We should be eager to do the good set before us. Remember there are things that God has lined up just for you. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph 2:10 So what happens if one of these divine appointments shows up and we are too busy with the wrong "eagerness?" I think this is why we are told so often in the gospels to "stay alert." The days and nights can certainly be filled with evil. Or they can be filled with the eagerness to do the good that God has set up for us. May our Lord keep you alert and eager for the good He has in store for us. Rudy I need to tell you that I am leaving for Padre and then the National Youth Gathering. I will attempt to write while I am on the road, but if you miss a day or so, don't get too upset at me. Peace. Rudy

Faith

I have just finished reading the famous faith chapter of Hebrews; chapter 11. It is amazing the things this author says about faith. Let me filter them for you through my eyes, which I admit are bias. First, he gives us this classic definition: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (1) But how many of us stop there? What about this not so comforting statement about faith: "without faith it is impossible to please God." (6) Then he goes on to list all the wondrous (and really stupid) things that the ancients did by faith. Let me say this: If any one of those things that he lists were brought before a voter's meeting they would not have been done. How do you think the vote would have gone on this one?: Let's build an ark, it will take us 100 years, and no we don't have the resources on hand. Or how about this one: let's take all the people and leave this land that we have been living in for the last 400 years and head off into the desert without food or water? I am beginning to wonder if a corporate body can have the faith that God requires. Obviously, the children of Israel would have voted to head back to Egypt many times, if it would have been brought up at a voter's meeting. The one time they did vote, their lack of faith ended up with a punishment of 40 years in the wilderness. In verse 34 of chapter 11 there is another benefit of faith. It turns our weakness into strength. Now I don't know about you, but if all of my weaknesses could instead be my strengths -- Wow! What I could accomplish for God! And all this a benefit of faith. So where is our faith. Is it in the strategies and wisdom of this world? Is it in our own abilities? Or is it placed squarely where it should be -- on the shoulders of Jesus Christ? I know I have some work to do. May He strengthen your faith! RudyPS I am still working on the address conversion.

