

# **CHURCH BULLETIN ARTICLES**

**Rays of Light  
from the  
Son Above**

By  
Ed Mathews

**VOLUME IV**

## **A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR**

The Sunday morning church bulletin is often a neglected avenue for delivering divine truth. Usually it serves to inform the congregation of scheduled meetings, sick members, attendance numbers, budget updates, and potluck plans. It keeps those who attend aware of the activities of the church. And, for that, it is a blessing.

The person who produces the bulletin is doing a great service. Kudos to those who work so hard behind the scenes to keep the community of faith in-the-know.

Often the Sunday morning bulletin has a section for spiritual encouragement (though, for various reasons, in some churches, that is becoming a thing of the past). Certainly it can become an onerous job to write or find a weekly bulletin message.

With no thought of blaming or shaming those who have omitted (or are considering the omission of) a spiritual message from the Sunday morning publication, the following bulletin articles were written.

The articles are short reminders for those who are serious about completing the long haul to their heavenly home. They are brief time outs for weary saints to catch a second wind. The following messages are rays of light from the Son above. They are a tonic for the trek to the city foursquare. They are gems of divine wisdom for the earthly journey.

The articles are a mere 280 words (give or take a few). Most people can read them in less than ninety seconds. Their value is multi-layered,

- . They prepare the reader to worship God.
- . They are based on the Bible.
- . They are written in simple English.
- . They focus on the needs of believers.
- . They lift up instead of tear down.
- . They address the mind, touch the heart, and convict the will.

The author wishes to help his brothers and sisters in Christ to have “a closer walk with God,” to “put their hope on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Like the above quotations, the following articles are rooted in the inspired word.

Read them. Use them. They are published for the benefit of anyone who finds them worthy.

Ed Mathews

January 2, 2021

## **Easy Does It**

Anyone who has ever washed dishes learns that a gentle flow of water will fill a cup. But, turn the facet on full blast, and the water sloshes out as fast as it goes in.

People are like cups. Their capacity is limited. If we try to fill them too fast, they stay empty. At one point in His ministry, Jesus told His disciples, *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear,"* [John 16:12](#).

1. Parents. Father and mothers find this out the hard way. When they visit grandma, they want their kids to be perfect angels. So they swamp the poor youngsters with instructions. The children are overwhelmed by the *"do this but don't do that."* During the visit they forget the rules. They act like heathens. The parents are mortified. Dad and mom turned on the "facet" too fast. Better to learn one thing and do it well than hear seven things and forget them all!

2. Preachers. Ministers discover this axiom, too. Some preachers put all their sermon eggs in one basket. Their lessons dazzle the congregation but fail to fill the cups. Other ministers go slowly. They patiently fill the cups—one thought at a time. Most preachers learn that it takes time to change behavior. So they introduce ideas slowly. So slowly that many people will suppose they thought of it first.

Jesus followed the same rule. He did not start by telling His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him. No! He initially encouraged them to be merciful, patient, and kind. The hard stuff was introduced later.

Easy does it!

Ed Mathews

## **Be Ready**

The surest thing in the world is the return of Christ. He is coming back. Count on it. We do not know the day or the hour. It will be a surprise. Therefore, we need to be ready, Luke 12:35.

The realization of His return "*at any moment*" is a great incentive to be prepared. If we knew a thief was coming to rob our house, would we not take precautions? Absolutely. Does this not also apply to the second coming of Jesus? Luke 12:39,40.

A school principal visited a class of fourth graders. He announced that there would be a prize given to the student with the cleanest desk. "*When will you return?*" a student asked. "*That I cannot tell you,*" the principal responded. "*It is up to each one of you to be ready!*"

A little boy, who was known for his disorderly habits, said that he was going to win the prize. His classmates laughed. "*No way,*" they jeered. "*Your desk is always messy.*"

"*But I will clean it every Monday,*" he said. "*Suppose the principal returns on Friday?*" the hecklers reasoned. "*Then I will clean it every morning,*" the youngster replied. "*Suppose the principal comes at the end of the day,*" his fellow students suggested. "*Well, then,*" the lad said, "*I will just keep it clean all day long!*"

So it should be with the servants of God. They must keep themselves clean every day—all day long. That was the advice of Jesus: "*Be ready.*"

Never begin a day without thinking He may interrupt it at any time.

Ed Mathews

### **So That You May Know**

For nearly forty years, Israel had experienced the extraordinary care of God. He had provided their food. He had supplied their drink. He preserved their clothes. But, in all of that, they did not perceive the kindness of heaven.

Their eyes did not see. Their ears did not hear. If there were a desire to recognize the goodness of the Lord, they would have understood. *"I did this,"* God said, *"so that you may know that I am the Lord your God,"* Deuteronomy 29:6.

1. Blindness. No nation saw more signs of divine presence than Israel. Yet, they failed to comprehend their history. A similar dullness hides heaven from the minds of people today. They fail to *"combine it with faith,"* Hebrews 4:2. There is an outward experience without an inward discernment.

2. Discernment. Understanding is given to those who want it, who seek it, who act in faithfulness to the light they already have, Psalms 25:9; Matthew 13:10-16. Divine illumination is indispensable to the understanding of spiritual truth, John 6:44,45; II Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 1:17.

The Hebrews saw the wonders of God, but did not see God. They saw the splendor of His majesty, but begged that that vision not be repeated. They were miraculously cared for, but had no eye to see the love that supplied it. Jehovah offered to be their God. They refused His offer.

Everyday God comes near us. He wants to be our Friend, to be our Lord. Everyday He renews His pledge to be our Savior and our Guide. How do we respond?

Many people claim to have an open mind but it is hard to find the opening.

Ed Mathews

### **Brains Or Bricks**

In 1960, the governor of Texas issued a proposed budget. He asked the state legislature to appropriate 50 million dollars for education—half for new school construction and half for classroom instruction. After considerable debate, the congress decided to give 32.6 million for “bricks” but only 7.4 million for “brains.”

A similar situation is reflected in many church budgets. Congregations are spending big bucks on bricks but pocket change on brains. Though members are happy to enjoy a comfortable building, they seem unconcerned about training the next generation. Yet, does not “*train up a child*” apply to the church as well as to the home? Proverbs 22:6.

What if the first century Christians had put their funds into bricks instead of brains? Where would we be now? What will the leadership of tomorrow be like given the meager amount of investment in developing them today? Are we putting the cart before the horse? Do we portray a “that-will-take-care-of-itself-as-long-as-we-have-a-building” mentality?

Furthermore, when we want a new building, we get an architect to design it. But, when it comes to the church education program, anyone can plan that. Could this contribute to our staggering amount of spiritual delinquency in the Body of Christ?

On average, Bible class teachers spend less than an hour preparing their lesson. And the students rarely have any “homework.” It takes more time than that to build a building. What about educating souls? Who is being shortchanged?

While we may need bricks, let us be sure to put brains ahead of a building lest we end up with a lot of “blockheads.”

Ed Mathews

### **Press For A Decision**

Joshua was nearing his death. He had lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan. It was almost a half-century after the exodus. The people of God were finally settling down in their new homeland. In his parting speech, Joshua urged Israel to faithfully follow the Lord, Joshua 24:14. It required a decision, Joshua 24:15.

There are many ministers in the Church who proclaim the word. They deliver attractive lessons. But they fail to drive home the urgency in making a commitment. Their message is pertinent. Yet they seldom press for a verdict. They start strong but end weak.

A story is told of a businessman who visited a large city congregation. After the service, he congratulated the minister on his sermon. *"Great lesson! Good delivery!"* he said. *"However, if you were my employee, I would fire you."* Startled, the clergyman asked, *"Why?"* *"Well,"* the visitor replied, *"You got my interest by your appearance, your voice, and your manner. Your prayer, your reading, and your message riveted my attention. I was ready to be challenged. But you stopped without asking me to do something!"* Then the salesman added, *"In my business, the most important thing is getting people to sign on the dotted line!"*

This is where our contemporary efforts often fall short. We do many good things. We say many great words. Yet, unlike Joshua, we omit pressing for a decision.

There was a time when the Bible was chained to the pulpit. Now it is time we chain the Church to the Bible.

Ed Mathews

## **He Ate And Left**

In the ancient Mediterranean world, a birthright was a big deal. The firstborn son received a double portion of the inheritance.

Esau was the eldest son. However, he “*despised*” his birthright, Genesis 25:34b. He “*sold it*” for a bowl of stew! Esau gobbled down the food. Then he “*got up and left*,” Genesis 25:34a.

1. Self-Indulgence. Esau twittered away his privilege. This is a real danger. Mundane things can preoccupy the mind. More important things can be reduced to insignificance. Hence, there is a need for watchfulness. We must be sure that ultimate things remain ultimate.

2. Self-Awareness. Future blessings must be a present concern, Romans 8:17; I John 3:2,3. Regarding the bliss of heaven as a distance hope can keep it out of sight. We must live like we are in heaven now. The present is the time of reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness. We have our birthright in our hands. Let us not delay its enjoyment.

It is sad that important truths bear so little influence in our everyday life. Yet, that is so. We like to hear the Gospel. We appreciate being warned about neglecting it. But, unfortunately, our lives are not shaped by the Good News.

We see multitudes adrift in sin. We say nothing to them. We do not even pray for them. Are we not like Esau? He was “*profane*,” Hebrews 12:16, that is, “*irreligious*” or worldly. We may go to church but our lives remain untouched by the transforming truths of God.

If we are not as close to God as we once were, guess who moved?

Ed Mathews



## **Love**

The golden thread that runs throughout the New Testament is love. On that thread is strung all the other virtues of Christianity.

- . "Love your enemies," Matthew 5:44.
- . "Do everything in love," I Corinthians 16:14.
- . "May...your love increase for each other...," I Thessalonians 3:12.
- . "Have sincere love for the brethren," I Peter 1:22.

There is nothing we can do, nothing we can think, and nothing we can be that will make us acceptable to God--if we lack love. We can faithfully attend church, we can regularly tithe, we can pray without ceasing, yet if we have love, all of that counts for nothing. As Paul said, *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, though I have the gift of prophecy and fathom all mysteries, though I have faith to remove mountains, though I give all my possessions to feed the poor and surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, I am nothing,"* I Corinthians 13:1-3. Could that be any clearer?

- . "He who hates his brother is still in darkness," I John 2:9.
- . "Anyone who does not love remains in death," I John 3:14.
- . "Whoever does not love does not know God," I John 4:8.

A fifth century saint wrote: *"We cannot attract the heathen unless we live attractive lives. Nothing attracts better than the warm light of love. The pagan will see God in us if we love one another. For God is love."*

Life is like a game of checkers. Therefore, think carefully before you make your next move.

Ed Mathews

## **Time Out**

Throughout His ministry, Jesus sought peace and quiet in remote places, Luke 9:10. In doing so, He set us an example. Those retreats were the filling stations of grace where He had refreshing fellowship with His Father. He withdrew to private places in order to prepare for public life.

An aged saint—with more than his share of hardships—would regularly go to his quiet room. It was a hideaway, a simple place without distractions. Away from family and phone, he had sweet communion with the Lord. His troubles would melt. His spirit was renewed. The rough patches in his life would become smooth. He was ready again “*to fight the good fight, to finish the race.*”

Such fellowship with God mends the wounds of the soul. They are precious occasions—fountains in the desert to serve the weary traveler. To skip these time outs is to jeopardize the completion of the trek. We are not in a race to get there first. We are on a mission to reach eternity (and to take others with us). We must not pass by the rest stops along the way.

Henry Martin, the famous missionary to India, said, “*the incessant pressures of life created a distance between him and God.*” The pressures he referred to were preparing Bible lessons! If that creates an impediment for being in touch with the Lord, how much more will the cares of this world get in the way?

Do we have a quiet place? Do we take regular time outs? If we want to be close to God, it is suggested we meditate on one of His promises and He will meet us there!

Ed Mathews

## **Delight In The Lord**

Psalm 37 is a “teaching” psalm. It deals with the fate of the saint and the sinner. The message is not addressed to God—as most psalms are—but to a group of young men. As a collection of proverbs, it teaches everyday morality.

This song played an important role in the Qumran community—a Jewish sect that flourished a century before Christ. Qumran is famous for preserving the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1. Delight In God Himself. The order of the words is important. The psalm says, “*Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart,*” Psalm 37:4. It does not say, “*The Lord gives you what you desire; therefore, delight in Him.*” It indicates that we delight in God first. Then, and only then, will our desires be met.

2. Delight In Our Relationship With Him. There is nothing selfish or exclusive in this delight. The more we have, the humbler we will become. The more we possess, the more qualified we are to bring others to it. “*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God,*” 1 John 3:1.

3. Delight In Obeying Him. Delighting in God enriches the soul. It represses vain longings, sinful notions, and unruly passions. It gives each day a peaceful calm. It is the crown of existence, the purpose of life. It is a high attainment (though within reach). Let us pursue it. It is within our grasp.

If we constantly thank God for our blessings, there will be no time to complain!

Ed Mathews

## **Missionary Myths**

During my career as a missionary, professor of missions, and facilitator of mission committee workshops, I have heard my share of negative comments about missionaries. Two of the most frequent criticisms are mentioned below.

1. A Missionary Is A Spiritual Masochist. Before people learn missionaries love being missionaries, it was common to believe they do not enjoy what they do. It is assumed they tolerate their circumstances. Actually, most missionaries see their ministry as a privilege. The vast majority cannot imagine doing anything else.

Missionaries are not spiritual masochists. They do not go abroad to suffer. They go overseas to serve. They feel called. When they arrive on the field, they find God is already there. They eat the local food. They adopt the local customs. They treat local believers as brothers and sisters.

2. A Missionary Is An Impractical Dreamer. To some people, missionaries appear to be adventurers in exotic places. They live different lives. Their schedules seem haphazard. They do not appear to have common sense. Many church members believe missionaries are wasting their time.

Certainly life across the pond is different. But are missionaries impractical dreamers? Is it impractical to offer "*the way, the truth, and the life*" to the lost in other places? They accept a challenge bigger than they can accomplish on their own. They empty themselves so they can bring fullness to others.

Who is the real victim of missionary myths? THE CHURCH IS! She often supports missionaries out of a sense of duty. But why be a victim? She could (and should) be a partner! cf. II Corinthians 8:23.

Ed Mathews

## **Giving**

We are told to “*give as we have been prospered*,” 1 Corinthians 16:2. In other words, we should give “in proportion to what we have earned” or “in keeping with our income.” Paul was not issuing a fundraising gimmick. No! He wanted us to learn some valuable lessons.

1. What Is Most Important. For many people, their paycheck is the road to happiness. They earn in order to spend. God gets the leftovers (if there are any). The Christian reverses that order. He puts the kingdom first, cf. Matthew 6:33.

2. Who Owns The World. Proportionate giving reminds us that everything belongs to God. This is His world. What we give is His money. He has entrusted us to use it wisely, to support His cause. Our gifts are really not ours.

3. How To Show Gratitude. We tend to think that we earn our living. Thus, our prosperity is a sign of our skill in making money. But wait! Are we not beholden to providence? Indeed, our giving is not a measure of our skill but our gratitude.

4. What Is Real Worship. Sunday is a time of giving. When our offering is in keeping with our income, we are giving part of ourselves. Thus, we learn—though unworthy—we are sacrificing something that (in a sense) is ours.

Experience is the best teacher. To learn these lessons, we must give—give “*in keeping with our income*.” The purpose of percentage giving is not the gift but the giver, not a balanced budget but a generous believer!

Therefore, do what you can with what you have for the sake of Him who gave it to us in the first place.

Ed Mathews

## **Prayer**

The disciples saw Jesus praying. When He had finished, they asked, “*Lord, teach us to pray,*” Luke 11:1. Interestingly, they did not say, “*Teach us to preach*” or “*Train us to sing.*” Yet, instruction is essential in making good preachers and song leaders.

We have schools of music. We have preacher training classes. We offer essential courses for honing these skills. But where are the lessons devoted exclusively to teaching prayer?

Before a minister delivers his sermon, he spends considerable time thinking through what he is going to say. And, likewise, the song leader consumes much time in preparing the song service. However, those who lead the prayers just “wing it.” They rarely have any instruction, preparation, or forethought.

A soldier had a habit of slipping out of the barracks at night to pray. One evening he was caught and immediately hauled before the post commander. “*What are you doing alone in the woods at night?*” the commanding officer demanded. “*I go into the forest to pray!*” “*Oh, you do. Well, then, since you have had so much practice, show us how you pray!*” “*Yes, sir,*” the soldier said. Immediately, he dropped to his knees. He had the most moving conversation with heaven. After his prayer, the commander meekly said, “*You may go. For, if you had not been praying in the woods, you would not have been able to pray like that here!*”

Taking time to be holy requires taking time to learn to be holy. It does not come to us naturally. The same is true of prayer. We pray best when we are taught to do so.

Ed Mathews

### **Gathering Or Scattering**

Christ healed a “*demon possessed man*.” The people were “*astonished*.” They assumed Jesus was the Messiah, Matthew 12:22,23. Indeed, they were right.

The crowd was ready to believe. But the Pharisees felt differently. They became angry. Good folks love goodness. Evil folks hate it. The grace of God hardens those who are not attracted to it.

1. The Accusation. The Pharisees were furious (though they could not deny the miracle). They simply attributed it to the power of satan, Matthew 12:24. They had come to this conclusion earlier, Matthew 9:34. What a malicious attitude! They berated Him who was greater than them. Their jealousy vented its spite.

2. The Reply. Jesus knew their thoughts. He exposed their stupidity. Surely satan would not fight against himself, Matthew 12:25. The evil one was smarter than that. So, therefore, in whose name did the Pharisees cast out demons? Perhaps, in the name of the Messiah! cf. Mark 9:38. Their problem was with Jesus. Surely, of all people, He could not be the Anointed One—could He?

3. The Warning. The Promised One had come. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of satan were locked in an intense struggle. There was no middle ground, no neutral zone. We are either for Him or against Him, Mark 9:40. Obviously, the Pharisees were against Him. They scattered (rather than gathered) people.

Indifferent, lukewarm Christians are not gathering souls for Christ either. In fact, they are scattering folks—driving them from the kingdom of light. They do not actively oppose the Lord. They do not think of themselves as enemies of God. Nevertheless, they are.

We may gather riches and honors but are we gathering people?

Ed Mathews

## **Are We Satisfied?**

Christianity is often associated with restrictions. Sermons are filled with negative commands. God is portrayed as a celestial policeman. Happiness seems like a distant wish. Is heaven interested in our being happy in this life? Many would say, *"I don't think so!"*

1. Challenging Advice. People, in the days of Isaiah, longed to find joy. The prophet did not berate their longing. He did not issue a list of "do's and don'ts." He merely asked a question: *"Why do you spend your money on what does not satisfy?"* Isaiah 55:2. Then he proceeded to answer his own inquiry. In so many words, he said, *"Search for happiness where it can be found,"* Isaiah 56:1.

3. Unavoidable Fact. Isaiah indicated that material things do not satisfy. There is not a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. In this world, all is *"vanity,"* Ecclesiastes 1:2. Squandering our time, energy, and wealth on physical stuff is useless. It does not bring lasting cheer. Only God can satisfy our desires, Psalms 145:16. Indeed, not our goodness but His grace leads to eternal satisfaction.

We must remove the obstacles. We must tear down the barriers. We must let our soul find the fulfillment it seeks in the Lord. *"Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,"* Matthew 4:4. *"Happy are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled,"* Matthew 5:6. Joy does not flow into the heart until commitment to heaven flows out of the heart.

Satisfaction is a choice not a response.

Ed Mathews



### **My Cup Overflows**

A curious phase occurs in Psalm 23:5: “*My cup overflows.*” It is a metaphor for abundant kindness. In the Middle East, it is full of meaning. And, among shepherds, it is rich in significance.

A generous host—in the Mediterranean world—pours refreshment for his guests until it sloshes over. To most people, such a gesture may appear sloppy. But, in the biblical world, it was a sign of bighearted hospitality. And, for a shepherd to fill the water trough till it sloshed out, was an indication of his love for his sheep.

Often water wells were deep. The water was brought to the surface by a rope tied to leather bucket. The bucket was let down and dawn up hand-over-hand—a slow and laborious process. If the shepherd had a hundred sheep, it could take two hours to water the flock.

A hireling shepherd was not so generous. He would give the sheep a few gulps of refreshment. Then, in order to save time and work, he would push them away from the trough.

A good shepherd would draw as much water as his sheep wanted. In other words, the trough would slosh over! The sheep could drink until satisfied. Likewise, God gives us “*good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over,*” Luke 6:38.

The Lord does not make our cup run over simply to give us the selfish joy of superabundance. He supplies us with more than enough so that the extra can slosh out to bless others around us. Is your cup overflowing? Are you directing the overflow to those who need the refreshment?

A cup of divine overflow is worth more than a boatload of human generosity.

Ed Mathews

## **Do It**

We are saved by faith that works. It is not enough to hear. It is not enough to believe. We must also obey. James asked, *"If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds, can such faith save him?"* James 2:14.

It is good to hear and believe. But that does not go far enough. It is like a car without gas, a locomotive without steam. It is useless, unproductive, and ineffective. Obviously, *"faith without works is dead,"* James 2:26.

1. Consider The Pharisees. These Jewish teachers were full of talk. The people were to follow their instructions. But they were not to do what the Pharisees did. *"For they did not practice what they preached,"* Matthew 23:3. It is one thing to talk about the instructions of God. It is quite another to do them.

2. Consider The Judgment. Christ will separate people into two groups: sheep and goats. The sheep will be saved. They assisted those in need. They did something. The goats will be lost. They failed to extend assistance. *"They knew to do good but did it not,"* James 4:17.

The Scriptures cannot be clearer. Talk is cheap. Work takes effort. Only worker bees gather honey. No one should be idle in the vineyard of the Lord. *"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock,"* Matthew 7:24.

Do you KNOW the truth? Do you BELIEVE the truth? And, equally important, do you DO the truth?

Between the great things we cannot do and the things we do not do, lies the danger of doing nothing at all.

Ed Mathews

### **Making The Secular Sacred**

A spiritual revival was sweeping the land. Jehoshaphat was leading the way. All of Israel was involved, II Chronicles 19:4.

Jehoshaphat gave special attention to the secular courts. He appointed judges. He told them to consider carefully what they do. For, they were not working for man but for the Lord, II Chronicles 19:5,6a. Their task required two important things.

1. Fear Of God. The decisions of the judges were to be rendered in *"the fear of the Lord," II Chronicles 19:9*. Years later, the apostle Paul echoed the same sentiment. He commanded slaves to serve their earthly masters in everything. *"Whatever you do,"* he said, *"work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men," Colossians 3:22,23*. This turns the secular into the sacred.

2. Presence Of God. Jehoshaphat reminded the judges that the Lord is with them whenever they gave a verdict, II Chronicles 19:6b. Therefore, he said, *"act with courage," II Chronicles 19:11b*. The allegiance of the courts must remain with God. Their decisions must please Him rather than curry favor with men. In every trial, they were to warn the people *"not to sin against the Lord," II Chronicles 19:10*.

If there was ever a formula for healing the wounds of strife among men, this was it. Prejudice would vanish. Goodwill would thrive. Why? There is no injustice, no partiality, and no bribery with God, II Chronicles 19:7. The sacred would rule over the secular.

This is similar to what Jesus prayed: *"May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Matthew 6:10*.

Ed Mathews

### **Going To Church**

*“Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness,” Psalm 29:2.* Public worship should bring us closer to God. It provides an accurate view of who we are. It shows us the needs of our fellowman. These gifts are available to all who assemble on Sunday (given they follow a few simple suggestions).

1. Prepare Beforehand. Get a refreshing rest Saturday night. Let the Sunday paper go till after church. The ball scores can wait. Fill the morning with happy thoughts. Let the worship come as a climax rather than an intrusion.
2. Come Early. Avoid hurrying. Plan to arrive fifteen minutes before services begin. That way, if you arrive ten minutes late, you are still on time!
3. Set Quietly. Read the bulletin. Leaf through the songbook. Pray for the sick. Take time to meditate. Conduct yourself like you would in a hospital waiting room.
4. Take Part. Worship is not a performance by the preacher. It is honoring the Lord. Follow the prayers, songs, and readings. Let the spoken words become your words. Pay attention. Participate. Be there.
5. Be Filled. Do not watch the clock. Listen to the lesson. Fill your heart with new thoughts. Look for refreshing ideas. Do not go away empty.

Not all worship services have the same effect. Therefore, it is good to remember that not one but a succession of summer showers make pretty flowers.

All things being equal, if our faith is not strong enough to get us to church, it will not be strong enough to get us to heaven.

Ed Mathews

**Faith In Action.**

Only God can see faith inside us. We are limited to seeing faith in action. As James said, *"I will show you my faith by what I do,"* James 2:18.

Faith is like a seed planted in the ground. It is hidden from view. If the seed is alive, it will sprout and come out of the soil. So also, until faith puts on work clothes, it remains hidden.

A chaplain found a dying soldier in a shallow foxhole. He asked the wounded man if he could read the Bible to him. *"No sir,"* the mortally injured man said, *"I need a drink."*

At the risk of his own life, the chaplain went looking for water. Eventually, he returned and gave the soldier a refreshing drink. Then, he asked, again, if he could read some Scripture to the bleeding man. *"No thanks. I am cold. Could you get me a blanket?"* Off the chaplain went. And, upon returning, wrapped the shivering lad in the army issue wool.

*"Now can I read to you,"* the chaplain asked. *"No sir,"* came the reply, *"I need you to hold me."* Once more the chaplain exposed himself to enemy fire in order to comfort the dying combatant. Then, at last, the soldier said, *"Now you can read. For, anyone who is willing to risk his life to ease a dying stranger is worthy of my attention."*

Amid the clamor of religious noise, the world waits to see faith in action. There is no honor where there is no testing. Until trials prove the reality of faith, an atheist may appear as a believer, a doubting disciple as a trusting saint.

Ed Mathews

## **Teamwork**

The ways of men are directed by the hand of God, Proverbs 20:24a. We are free but still responsible for our conduct.

1. Divine Guidance. We need the Lord to direct our paths. Our knowledge of today will not get us through the challenges of tomorrow. Therefore, the promise of His guidance is welcome. *"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way," Psalm 25:9.* And, again, *"He will instruct us in the way we should go," Psalm 32:8.* Yes, the Lord will guide us with His counsel. And, afterward, take us into glory, cf. Psalm 73:24. There is no way we can get to heaven without His help.

2. Human Responsibility. In spite of all His promises of guidance, we are held accountable for our actions. For, on the Day of Judgment, we will give an account for every careless word we speak, cf. Matthew 12:36. Indeed, each one of us will be responsible for everything we do, Romans 14:12. This is no laughing matter. With the help of reason, we may judge other men. But, with the precepts of God, we must prepare for the final exam. Are we ready?

We should ponder our behavior twice before we act once. God guides but we are to blame for our mistakes. To act on impulse, before we consider the consequences, is reckless. Only fools blunder ahead without due thought of where they are going.

God and man form a team. The Lord is the coach. Humans are the players. Together they form a winning duo. He calls the plays. We carry the ball. Victory is assured (when the coach is obeyed).

Teamwork makes life work.

Ed Mathews

## Ghosts

Night seems to be the time for ghosts. Spirits prefer to roam in the shadows. Or, perhaps, it is in the evening, when those susceptible to “*seeing the unseen*” are most willing to believe they saw a ghost.

This may be why séances are held in subdued light. They require the “*right atmosphere*.” That usually means shades are drawn, eyes are closed, and minds are empty. Otherwise, the spirits will not visit!

All of this makes the resurrection of Jesus more remarkable. His reappearing was completely free of “*spookiness*.” He showed Himself in open spaces to skeptical folks who were not expecting to see Him.

1. In Broad Daylight. There is no doubt that He was publicly executed. But, when they were first told of His resurrection, they discounted the report as “*hysterical nonsense*.” Hence, when they saw Him, in broad daylight, they concluded He “*must be a ghost!*” Luke 24:36,37.

2. In Human Flesh. We cannot blame them. They had just buried their friend a few hours earlier. We understand their surprise. We can feel their fear. We sense their doubt. So Jesus told them to touch Him, Luke 24:38. “*A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have*,” He said. Later, He cooked food. He worked miracles. He taught them important lessons. Indeed, He was ready alive again!

The disciples were not “*seeing things*.” No...they knew it was the Lord. They knew He had conquered death. And, before long, they were telling the whole world about His resurrection, 1 John 1:1,2.

What changed these very ordinary men into extraordinary evangelists? Was it a ghost? Or was it God?

Ed Mathews

### **Out Of Joint**

Jacob wrestled with “*a man*” all night, [Genesis 32:24](#). The event was a turning point in his life. Heretofore, the ancient patriarch had managed to get the upper hand by devious schemes. Deceit was his trademark, the significance of his name. On this particular night, however, Jacob failed to control his opponent, [Genesis 32:25](#).

God was seeking, by this wrestling match, to show who was the boss. The man who struggled with Jacob made him realize his limitations by throwing his hip out of joint. Jacob surrendered. God took over.

What is the significance of this story? Why put his hip out of joint? The tendon of the thigh is the strongest in the human body. Yet, God, with a simple touch, overcame the perpetual schemer. Jacob was no longer in-the-driver’s-seat. In other words, the Lord has to wrestle with us at the strongest point in our life so He can take control.

God is not merely looking for brilliant people. He is not solely dependent on eloquent folks. The Lord wants broken people to take the Good News to the tribes, tongues, and nations of the world.

When He desires something done, He recruits those who have surrendered themselves. He looks for those who have submitted to His rule. He takes those whose confidence is not in themselves but in the Almighty, [Colossians 2:20](#).

Like Jacob, we must let the Lord overcome our strongest point of resistance. And, when this is done, the floodgate will be opened for Him to pour His power into our life.

There is victory in surrender when we allow Christ to take over.

Ed Mathews



## **Manners**

We are living in a time of society upheaval. Marches and riots (that often end in looting and burning) are reported regularly on the nightly news. Unrest is everywhere. This toxic atmosphere challenges our manners. What should we say? What should we do?

Rebellious behavior is often equated with following Jesus. Should it be? I do not know how much the Lord cared about manners. Yet, I am sure, He cared about power—its value and purpose, its abuse and damage.

1. What Manners? The disciples of the Lord “*turned the world upside down.*” They disturbed the status quo. They were not benign believers—quiet and cuddly. They upset society. They made waves. How, then, should we act? Should we riot? Should we join in the hateful shouting? Should we defy civil authorities in an effort to gain racial justice and social equality?

2. What Demeanors? Just below the surface of our lives lurks deep and painful realities. On the right and the left—and everywhere in between—lies the prejudices and hatreds that plague our world. Indeed, something must be done. Change is needed. But, lest we get caught up in the noise and smoke of the uproar, we must remember Christians are called to something higher and better than the struggles on our streets.

The way of Christ is not action-less action. It lives above the noise. It yields to a power that rules the universe. It listens to His urging: “*Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God,*” Micah 6:8. These are the ingredients of a radical lifestyle during a time of fanatical behavior.

It is time we mind our manners!

Ed Mathews

## **Unity**

Why should we be surprised if the religious world does not take seriously our plea for unity. We ourselves have divided over the smallest matters. It is hypocritical to preach unity and practice division. We will not convince others of our sincerity until we face up to our own dysfunction. We have certainly fallen short of the unity about which Christ prayed, John 17:20,21.

An internationally known leader in the Methodist Church was asked what he thought about our emphasis on unity. His answer was most revealing. *"The churches of Christ have the greatest intentions,"* he replied, *"but practice them with the narrowest sectarianism."*

His point is well taken. I apply his words to the attitudes we have toward one another in the Restoration Movement (though he may have been referring to our practices toward other denominations).

Those who are immersed by faith into Christ believe their unity is based on the word of God. But we haggle over our opinions of what the Bible says. In other words, we are prone to lift human judgment to the level of divine inspiration.

The tragedy is that all segments of our unity movement are divided over personal interpretations. We are blind to our own faults. We are guilty of believing it is others who are wrong (instead of ourselves).

I think there is less reason for the existence of factions within the churches of Christ than with denominations outside the churches of Christ. It is high time brethren begin seeing how close they can be rather than how far apart they are. Unity begins with me.

No one should drive the wedge nor blame others for splintering our unity in Christ.

Ed Mathews

## **Being Wise**

The Book of Proverbs is filled with pithy statements about wisdom. These terse sayings are welcome guidance for daily life. He who adopts them will prosper, Proverbs 19:8.

The following proverbs are a short list about wise behavior. They are written for our learning.

1. Falsehood. It is certain. A false witness condemns himself, Proverbs 19:9. Dishonesty is like a boomerang. When you think it is gone, it will come back to haunt you.

2. Vanity. Those who have an inflated self-esteem are obnoxious when successful, Proverbs 19:10. It is wise to know our place. It is wiser to keep it.

3. Tolerance. It is good to bear unjust treatment, Proverbs 19:11. It is better to overcome it with good, cf. Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 2:19. The greatest achievement is turning enemies into friends.

4. Idleness. Though society does not read the Bible, it seems to instinctively know that *"he who does not work should not eat,"* Proverbs 19:15. The biggest discovery one can make is to realize that a job is an opportunity.

5. Obedience. Everyone has a boss—someone to whom he must give an account. No one is exempt. Therefore, it is wise to follow instructions, Proverbs 19:16.

6. Kindness. God looks on the poor as His own. Our thoughtfulness toward the less fortunate is one way of serving the Lord, Proverbs 19:17. We cannot do a kindness too soon because we never know when it will be too late.

Wisdom is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity. Grasp it! Do not let it go!

It is wise to listen to the above advise, Proverbs 19:20.

Ed Mathews

### **Thanks For Nothing**

I decided that it was time to give thanks for what I never had. It was an expression of appreciation for adversity. It was a response to the molding influences of hardship, cf. 1 Peter 2:19.

*. I am grateful for growing up in modest means—simple meals before payday. The cupboards were bare. Supper was a bowl of corn meal mush. No snacks. No dissert. The memory makes it easy to give to those in need.*

*. I am grateful for the simple house, the hand-me-down clothes, and the old car. Dad and Mom did their best. They taught me to enjoy what I had (rather than what I wanted).*

*. I am grateful for the bumps and bruises of living in a fallen world. They were not fun (but they were necessary). They helped me love the wounded I meet along the path of life.*

*. I am grateful for my cranky neighbors, for angry drivers, and ornery clerks. They are what I would be without the Lord in my life. They remind me to give them what they need rather than what they deserve.*

When adversity happens, we can choose to be bitter or better.

Things got much worse after the first Thanksgiving. Therefore, at the second Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims put five kernels of dried corn on their plates. During the “meal,” a cup was passed around the table. As each person dropped one of their kernels in the cup, they shared something for which they were thankful. Then they ate the remaining four kernels!

This year I am thankful for everything I never had.

Ed Mathews

## **Hard Preaching**

Paul was conflicted. He had sent a harsh letter to the Corinthians. They needed correction. When he learned how they received his rebuke, he was relieved. *“Even if I caused you sorrow,” he said, “I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that I hurt you—yet now I am happy not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led to repentance,”* II Corinthians 7:8,9.

His reaction is very much like the feelings of a preacher who delivers a “hard sermon.” The purpose behind such a message is frequently misunderstood. The audience assumes he cares little about them. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth.

The congregation need not feel mistreated when the preacher delivers a tough talk. The discomfort of the brethren is small compared to the distress of the minister. Few preachers enjoy delivering a “hard sermon.” And, though he seems calm, he literally agonizes over the lesson he presents.

How would you feel if a loved one was in a burning building and refused to escape? Can you imagine the emotional exhaustion after thirty minutes of unheeded begging? In a similar way, that is how the preacher feels after pouring out his heart to an audience that seems to care less.

The next time a minister seems to “rack you over the coals” it might be good to have a little sympathy for him. It is very likely that the sermon you are enduring for a few minutes is the same one he has been dreading for a whole week! Nevertheless, he says what he says because he loathes hell a whole lot more.

It is always good policy to avoid bad outcomes.

Ed Mathews

### **Doing Our Part**

Just before leaving Egypt, the children of Israel were busy obeying the command of God. Their successful departure depended on following His instructions. *“Take a lamb...slaughter it...and put some of the blood on the sides and on the top of the door frame,” Exodus 12:3,6,7.*

Heretofore, the Israelites had done nothing. Nine plagues had fallen on the Egyptians. God had changed water into blood. He had sent swarms of frogs, lice, and flies. The Lord had commissioned a terrible pestilence on the animals followed by boils on men and cattle. Then, He dispatched hail. In addition, the Almighty brought an army of locusts to finish off what little was left. Before He was finished, He sent darkness—a darkness one could feel. Yet, during this year of judgment on Egypt, the Israelites were merely sideline spectators.

In the final plague the people of God were to get busy. They had something to do. A Passover lamb had to be killed and eaten. The first nine judgments demonstrated the grace of God. The tenth judgment included the action of Israel. God did His part. Now Israel was required to do her part.

If the children of Abraham had remained idle, their deliverance would have been forfeited. The grace of God demanded action. It was a free gift. Yet that gift had to be “unwrapped.”

Today, those who believe must obey. Their faith involves works. Indeed, humans must do their part in order to be saved. When the crowd on Pentecost asked, *“What must we do?”* Peter said, *“Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins,” Acts 2:38.*

God does not do for us what He has asked us to do for ourselves!

Ed Mathews

## **Ask**

Jesus invited us to pray. He assured us that God would respond, Matthew 7:8. Our asking is much more than repeating some memorized words. It is our longing for Him with groaning that cannot be uttered. And, *"if we ask, we shall receive."*

1. Invitation To Pray. It is not merely permissible for us to pray. We are encouraged to do so. The Lord gave us the code to unlock the storeroom of heaven. There are things we need in order to navigate this life. Prayer is much more than confiding in God. It is a voice crying in the dark. An answer must be given or despair will overtake us. God is not ignorant of our needs, Matthew 6:32. He gives what we would otherwise not have.

2. Confidence To Pray. God is our Father. And, as a father, He knows how to supply our necessities, Matthew 7:9-11. His willingness to provide is virtually unlimited. A loving father does not neglect his children. To believe He would is to make Him into a heartless monster. Is not God better than the best of men? How dare we think otherwise! If sinful fathers on earth refuse to deceive their children, surely our Father in heaven would not stoop to such meanness.

Wherever this truth has taken root, it has produced fruit. It has moved people to ask for things beyond their fondest dreams. The prayerful have secured blessings that others can only wish for. All of this is because they trustingly pray (and He lovingly responds).

His free, unqualified invitation was issued in one, easy-to-grasp, simple word: ASK.

Ed Mathews

## **Measuring The Church**

How should we measure the strength of the church? What is the best way to determine the health of a congregation? Is it how many attend the assembly? Is it the grandeur of the building? Is the church strong because business owners, outstanding citizens, or famous people are present?

No doubt, when inquiring about the people of God in a particular area, you have heard "*the church is weak*." Or, you may have been told, "*the church was strong*." How is that conclusion reached?

There is an old adage that gives us a clue. "*It is not the size of the dog that is in the fight but the amount of fight in the dog*" which settles the issue.

The Lord said, it is "*not by (human) might nor by (earthly) power but by My Spirit*," Zachariah 4:6. And the Scriptures remind us that "*He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world*," I John 4:4. Indeed, we are strong because "*one can rout a thousand*" when the Lord fights for him, Joshua 23:10. Or, to say it differently, when we are weak, then we are strong (if we depend on God), cf. II Corinthians 12:10.

We must not be misled by the usual means of measuring the church. The body of Christ is powerful when every member—whether few or many—walks with the Lord. When commitment is present, the church is strong, the cause of righteousness prospers, and the community of mankind is benefited. If we are going to measure—and likely we will—let us use the yardstick of God.

The strength of the church is not decided by human standards but by divine power.

Ed Mathews



## **Walk In The Lord**

The Christian life can be summed up in two words: “standing” and “walking.” As forgiven sinners, we find a new standing in Christ. This union with Him is the grace wherein we stand, Romans 5:2. Thereafter, the redeemed must move on, walking in the Lord. Or, as it is written, “*they are to walk worthy of Christ*,” Colossians 1:10.

1. Standing. The life of a Christian begins in the grace of God. Through Jesus, we are saved. God provides salvation in the One who paid the penalty we could not pay. The Lord provides a new status before the throne, a new standing among the angels on high.

2. Walking. Those that stand are encouraged to walk, Romans 4:12; I John 1:7. Walking indicates moving forward, making progress. It implies “*growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ*,” II Peter 3:18. Walking results in fruitfulness. It demonstrates the reality of our standing.

Some people have accepted Jesus but remain where they began. They have not walked in the light. Their faith is hidden. It is dormant, unexercised. According to Paul, if we walk in the Spirit, we will not gratify our sinful desires, Galatians 5:16.

*Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior,  
Trying to follow our Savior and King:  
Shaping our lives by His blessed example,  
Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring.*

Even if we are on the right track, we will get run over if we just stand there.

Ed Mathews

### **Be Thankful**

Recently a nationally syndicated advice column published this story. It seems a spouse desired to divorce a partner. The person wanted the divorce to be *“the most painful possible.”*

The columnist responded with the following suggestion. *“Spend the next month doing every nice thing for your partner you can possibly do. Then, after these four weeks of kindness, walk off and leave your spouse.”*

A month later the person wanting the divorce appeared at the office of the columnist. *“Well, when will the divorce be granted?”* the marriage advisor asked. *“Divorce!”* the spouse exclaimed, *“what divorce? I fell in love with my partner.”*

This is the remedy for every disgruntled saint. When we are upset with someone (or something) in the church, we should spend the next month attending every service, studying every lesson, and participating in every activity. We should find something good in everything and everyone. I guarantee, after thirty days of kind appreciation, we will love the congregation.

Whenever I am disappointed in life, I stop and remember Bobbie. He was a nice kid (though a bit slow mentally). He tried out for the football team. He had his heart set on playing. When the day came for announcing who made the cut, Bobbie came home all excited. He told his mom, *“I have been chosen to sit on the bench.”*

Paul gave similar advice: *“Give thanks in all circumstances,”* 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Grow where we are planted.

Ed Mathews

### **Hold To The Teachings**

On his sixteenth birthday, George Williams left his home in rural England. He found a job working at a hardware store in London. He was one among fifteen clerks who lived in the home of their employer (a common British custom in the late 1800's).

George became a Christian. He shared his faith with his fellow clerks. Several of them accepted the Lord. Three years later, he found a job in a firm that employed over a hundred workers. Again, through sharing his faith, he led dozens to Christ.

George was not satisfied with bringing people to faith. He wanted to teach them more fully. He formed a class to disciple his converts. But non-believers wanted to attend. The class became very large. Many more were converted.

George kept a list of those who did not turn to God. He prayed for them. Soon many professed faith. His employer was one of them. George had a problem. How were his converts to grow in "*the grace and knowledge of the Lord?*"

The ministry of George Williams continued to reach more and more people. The challenge was figuring out how to ground them in the teachings of the Master. Williams came up with an idea. He formed an organization for reaching and nurturing young men. He called it the YMCA or Young Men's Christian Association!

Williams took the words of the apostle Paul seriously. "*Stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you,*" II Thessalonians 2:15.

Ideas are funny things. They do not do anything until they are put in practice.

Ed Mathews

### **Just As I Am**

Charlotte Elliot wrote one of the most popular hymns of all time. It was a confession of sin and failure, an acknowledgement of relief and peace. *"Just As I Am"* was born out of bitterness toward God regarding the limitations of her circumstances.

Charlotte was an invalid. She deeply resented the constraints of her handicap. While the local preacher was visiting her home, Charlotte expressed her frustration. The minister was touched by her distress. He insisted that her difficulties should not be allowed to deter her from being useful. The preacher challenged her to let God take her as she was. She protested. He advised coming to the Lord with all her bitterness.

This did not set well with Charlotte. She took offense at what seemed to be the calloused attitude of the minister. Nevertheless, in due time, she asked God to do as He pleased. She surrendered. Each year, on the anniversary of her decision, the minister wrote Charlotte a letter. He encouraged her to remain strong.

In 1836, on the fourteenth anniversary of her decision, while alone in the evening, the forty-seven year old invalid wrote her spiritual biography.

*Just as I am, though tossed about  
Fightings and fears within, without  
Oh, Lamb of God, I come.*

Many years later, Henry Elliott, the brother of Charlotte, said, *"Far more has been accomplished by the hymn of my sister than all I ever tried to do!"* It reminds us of the words of Jesus: *"Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden,"* Matthew 11:28.

God can do wonders where He is allowed to work.

Ed Mathews

## **Prayer Works**

Human ability is limited. Our resources are finite. We can do many things. But we cannot do everything. We must rely on a higher power.

The key that unlocks boundless blessings is prayer. Jesus said, *"Everyone who asks receives,"* Matthew 7:8a. The gifts of heavenly supply are legendary. The following story is just one example.

While crossing the Atlantic, a preacher was asked to address the passengers. He spoke on "Answered Prayer." An atheist was present. After the presentation, the skeptic was asked, *"What did you think of the message on prayer?"* Without hesitation, he answered, *"I did not believe a word of it!"*

The same afternoon the preacher spoke again. Many who attended the morning session were present. The atheist stayed away. *"I will not waste my time with such drivel,"* he said.

The unbeliever sat on the deck in a lounge chair. The preacher delivered part two of his lesson on prayer: *"He who seeks finds,"* Matthew 7:8b. The atheist was close enough to hear the sermon. He decided to give prayer a try. He asked God for an apple.

The skeptic fell asleep. In the spirit of fun, a young boy put an apple in the open hand of the snoring non-believer. A few minutes later the doubter woke up and discovered the apple. He could not believe it. *"How can it be?"* he thought.

Just then the preacher concluded his lesson. *"And to him who knocks, the door will be opened,"* Matthew 7:8c. The astonished atheist eventually accepted Christ. Prayer changes things! It has cured more people than all the medicine in the pharmacy.

Where prayer focuses, power falls.

Ed Mathews

### **Situation Obedience**

Likely, we have heard of “situation ethics.” It is a convenient escape from the application of moral imperatives. One can choose to react to a particular situation by doing what appears best under the circumstances (rather than follow the unbending rule of God). Hence, lying, stealing, and murder are acceptable when the situation suggests such behavior.

God has spoken (more than once) about such thinking. He has made it clear that His plumb line for moral behavior is not determined by the emergency of the moment.

We have generally refused the teaching of “situation morality.” Yet, are we not guilty of “situation obedience?” We have placed certain commandments in the category of things that may (or may not) be done!

The most glaring example of such failure regards the command to “preach the gospel.” Jesus did not say, “If you can” or “If it is convenient.” He said “Go” because it was imperative. *“For, how can others hear without someone preaching to them?”* Romans 10:14. There are no “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts” about it.

If difficult commands can be sidestepped because they are difficult, Noah would never have built the ark. Abraham would never put Isaac on the altar. And Jesus would never have died for our sins.

We go into “all of the world” in spite of the rigors involved. We do what we are told regardless of the situation. God issued the command. He supplies the strength. It is up to us to accept the circumstances and follow His directions. Dare we make a mockery out of the simple command to go?

If we can win a friend for ourselves, surely we can win a friend for Christ.

Ed Mathews

### **They Will Not Toil In Vain**

David and Seva Flood, a couple from Sweden, went as missionaries to Africa in 1921. They settled in a remote village among unreached people. The Africans were hostile. The climate was oppressive. Seva died giving birth to a girl.

David was consumed with doubt. Why had God let them down? They had sacrificed so much for Him. Their work resulted in only one convert—a teenage boy.

David gave his little girl to a childless missionary couple. This couple, like David, left Africa a few years later. David returned to Sweden. His daughter was raised in Pennsylvania. Her name was Aggie.

David turned away from Christ. He rarely thought of Aggie. She thought of him regularly. *How was he? Where did he live? Did he remarry? Did he have more children?*

Aggie attended Central Bible College. She married a mission student named Dewey Hurst. They served as missionaries in Africa. The Hursts visited the village where Aggie was born, where David served as a missionary.

Aggie wanted to find her father. So, on a furlough trip back to America, the Hursts detoured to Sweden. They found David in Stockholm. He was 73 years old, bedridden, and dying of alcoholism. Aggie told her dad about his convert. The lad grew up to be a preacher. He planted a church that had over 600 members.

It was an emotional moment for David. He had not labored in vain. He recommitted his life to the Lord. He had a reason to live (though he only lived six more months).

Thank God! We do not labor in vain, I Corinthians 15:58.

Ed Mathews

## **Called By God**

A Christian answers the call of God. The word “church” (in Greek) is *ekklesia*. It is a compound term. The first syllable is *ek* which means “*out from*.” The last syllable is *kaleo* that signifies “*to call*.” The church, then, is a group of people “*called out from the world*.”

The Bible mentions at least five callings. We are both called “out” of something and called “into” something.

- . “Out of darkness” (conversion), I Peter 2:9.
- . “Into fellowship” (communion), I Corinthians 1:9
- . “To holiness” (consecration), I Peter 1:15
- . “For blessing” (kindness), I Peter 3:9
- . “Unto glory” (coronation), I Peter 5:10

The Christian calling begins with hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Gospel, accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit, leads the receptive hearer to faith, repentance, and baptism. Salvation is the gracious work of God in the obedient.

We are called out of darkness and into light. We have fellowship with the Lord. We are kind to our fellowman—even those who persecute us. And, if we remain faithful in this way of living, we will be called home to be with our Father in heaven.

How many “callings of God” have we experienced? How much progress have we made in accepting the various invitations of the Lord? Our calling is not a one-time event. It is a lifelong journey, a continuous acquisition of the characteristics of Him who saves us.

We are “*encouraged to live lives worthy of God*,” I Thessalonians 2:12. As His chosen people—holy and loved—let us clothe ourselves with the beauty of His holiness, Colossians 3:12.

Those who answer His call walk in His way!

Ed Mathews



## **No Room**

Caesar had decreed that the world should be enrolled for the purpose of taxation. Everyone was to go to his ancestral city. Though late in her pregnancy, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the inns were already full. They were obliged to stay in a stable. It was there that Jesus was born, Luke 2:6,7.

What happened to Him in Bethlehem was typical throughout His entire life. There was no room for Him.

1. The City Of His Birth. Joseph fled to Egypt. He escaped because Jesus was not wanted. The authorities were searching for Him in order to kill Him, Matthew 2:13.

2. The Town Where He Grew Up. After listening to His sermon, the people drove Him out of town. They took Him to the brow of a hill in order to throw Him down a cliff, Luke 4:29.

3. The Hearts Of His Family. Though they were blood kin, His own brothers did not believe in Him, John 7:5.

4. The People In His Nation. Because He offended them, the citizens of His own country had no room for His message, John 8:37.

5. The World As A Whole. He was despised and rejected by men. In spite of what He did, He was not appreciated, Isaiah 53:3.

These painful experiences continued throughout His entire life on earth. People still refuse Him room in their lives. It is not enough to give Him prominence. We should give Him preeminence. Jesus should be given our best as well as our all.

There will be no room in heaven for those who provide Him no room on earth.

Ed Mathews

## **Forgive**

We are told to “*forgive as the Lord has forgiven us,*” Colossians 3:13. Good advice but difficult to do. Corrie ten Boom knew that all too well.

Her family hid Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Because of their kindness the ten Boom family was incarcerated in a Nazi death camp. Only Corrie survived.

In 1947, two years after her release, she returned to the death camp as a visitor. There she was allowed to speak. Her message was on forgiveness. She was unaware of the challenge she was about to face.

At the conclusion of her speech, a man came forward. Corrie recognized him. He had been a guard at the camp—one of the cruelest. “*A fine message, Fraulein,*” he said. He extended his hand to greet her.

*“I was dumbfounded,”* she said. *“I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, was now being required to forgive!”*

*“You mentioned you were interned here,”* the former guard said, *“I was one of the guards.”* Though Corrie remembered him, He did not remember her.

*“After the war,”* he continued, *“I became a Christian. I know God has forgiven me of the terrible things I did here. Fraulein, will you forgive me, too?”* And, with that, he again stuck out his hand in friendship.

Corrie was shocked. She thought of the innumerable times she had asked God to forgive her. Now it was her turn to forgive her former tormentor.

She grasped his hand. And, with tears in her eyes, she said, *“God loves you and I love you, too.”*

Those who forgive most are the most forgiven. So, when we have been wronged, a bad memory is our best response.

Ed Mathews

### **Use Your Gift**

*"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms," 1 Peter 4:10.*

Jim was a success engineer. He played sports on the weekends. He was married with two children. Life was good. Then, without warning, everything changed.

A drunk driver smashed into his car. His family was killed. He lost both legs and an arm. Only his right limb remained (though his pinky and the next two fingers were amputated).

While lying alone in a nursing home, he fought depression. Finally, Jim decided he must do something. He struggled to figure out how he could serve others. His opportunities were limited. With only a thumb and an index finger, he decided he could write to men in prison. He chose to send encouraging messages to those who had no hope of release. He could relate to them. He had no hope of release either.

The local maximum-security prison agreed to distribute his letters though they would not be answered. It was against prison rules. He wrote twice a week. It taxed his strength and ability to the max. Jim packed into those letters all his faith and optimism. It was a daunting task. He often felt discouraged. He was tempted to quit. *"What was the use?"* he thought. But, upon reconsideration, it was either do that or do nothing.

One day Jim received a letter from the warden of the prison. *"Keep writing!"* the letter said. *"And use the most durable paper."* The prisoners are passing them from cell to cell till they literally fall apart.

Our greatest help is to help someone else.

Ed Mathews

## Grace

A young preacher took his concordance and studied every passage on “*the grace of God.*” The exercise was an eye-opener. New vistas of appreciation for the mercy of God flooded his heart. Soon he was telling everyone about the undeserved favor of heaven.

The minister asked a man if he knew grace! Startled, the man replied, “*Grace who?*” Of course, “grace” is not a person. It is a blessing offered to us by a Person. Paul described grace as “*divine kindness through Jesus Christ,*” Ephesians 2:7. There are various stages of grace.

- . Initial grace by which we are saved, Ephesians 2:4,5. It is our justification.
- . Sustaining grace after we are saved. Here is where the Lord makes known to us the mystery of His will, Ephesians 1:7-10.
- . Inheritance grace or the gift of our redemption in heaven, Ephesians 1:13,14. This is our glorification.

A woman—so the story goes—was about to give her life to Christ. The devil appeared to her. Satan tried to sow seeds of doubt. “*Though you may believe today, how are you going to continue believing in the future?*” The woman pointed to a water-powered gristmill nearby. “*What turns the mill today?*” she asked. “*The river.*” “*What will turn it tomorrow?*” Again satan answered, “*The river.*” “*And the day after that?*” “*The river!*”

The woman was convinced. There is an abundance of grace to forgive, to keep, and to redeem. “*Wherefore (Jesus) is able to save COMPLETELY those who come to God through Him,*” Hebrews 7:25. No wonder it is called “marvelous,” “infinite,” and “matchless” grace. It is a gift that keeps giving.

Everyone who has found grace discovers that grace found him first.

Ed Mathews

### **Kids Need Parents**

Parents want to provide for their children. So they give them things. This is commendable but relatively unimportant. What kids really want are parents. In a materialistic world, dads and moms must guard against substituting things for themselves.

Parents must not “*embitter*” their kids, Colossians 3:21. There are many ways to disappoint a child. None is more common than neglecting to give them attention. Physical stuff does not make up for the absence of a parent. It is best to spend half as much money and twice as much time on your children.

The greatest gift for your kids is you. Unfortunately, many fathers take a second job because “they want to provide for their family.” Many mothers work to earn more money because “they love their children.” In the process, the kids are deprived of what they want most—the presence of their parents.

Buying things for our kids will never take the place of doing things with them. I never had a new bicycle. But I had a dad who showed me how to repair a used one. I never had a new baseball glove. But I had a dad who played catch with me. I never had a lot of things other kids have. But I had parents who loved me. I never felt uncared for because I had the best parents any kid could ever hope to have.

A new house, another car, or better furniture is not important to children. They do not need things. They need parents who will guide them, appreciate them, and encourage them. In short, they need parents who have time for them.

The best thing about being a parent is being a parent.

Ed Mathews

### **Prodigal Came Home**

The story of the prodigal son has been experienced again and again throughout history. It always has a happy ending. A son leaves home, falls into sin, but returns to the welcoming arms of his father.

Such was the real life scenario of Pedro. He grew up in a small village in rural Costa Rica. His father preached for several tiny congregations in the area. Pedro was an exceptional student though his parents were often unable to pay for his tuition. Nevertheless, little by little, he was able to graduate.

He scorned his former life. Pedro was convinced he could rise above the meager circumstances of his dad. He moved to the city. He found a job. He enjoyed the pleasures of life: dancing, drinking, and adultery. He spent his money as fast as he earned it. The occasional trip back home was an annoying reminder of how far he had strayed. His visits became fewer and shorter.

Several years later he received word that his father had died. Suddenly Pedro realized how much he respected his old man. His father had chosen to stay in the village to serve those who would not otherwise hear the Gospel. Pedro was heartbroken.

He returned to his roots. The funeral was overwhelming. Thousands of people came to honor the man they revered. It was an eye opener. Pedro confessed his sin. His mother said, *"This son of mine was dead. Now he is alive again,"* cf. Luke 15:24. Eventually he preached for the churches his father had lovingly served. Recently the former prodigal also died. He is buried beside his parents.

Like Pedro, we have one thing in common with God: we make our own world!

Ed Mathews

### **A Bar Of Soap**

Millie was a quiet girl. Her clothes were dirty. Her hair was matted. Millie was poor. She did not fit in (though she tried). It is hard for a girl in the fifth grade to be so different. But she was.

One night, while eating dinner, Becky casually mentioned Millie. Her mother suggested she invite Millie to a sleep over. Becky was aghast. *"Oh, I can't do that!"* *"Why?"* her mother asked. *"She stinks."*

In spite of her objections, Becky agreed to invite Millie. It was awkward at first. But Becky's mom helped Millie adjust. They cooked the meal. Set the table. The house was filled with laughter. Everyone had fun.

When it was close to bedtime, the tub was filled with warm water. A bar of fragrant soap was unwrapped. Millie did not know what to do with it. She had never seen a bar of soap. It did not take long for her to learn. The girls had a great time. Becky and Millie became good friends. At the end of the year, Millie moved away. Becky never saw her again.

Thirty years later, Becky stood at the lotion-and-soap counter. Suddenly, while smelling the soap, she remembered Millie. She bought the soap so her daughter could invite a classmate to a sleep over. They had a great evening. Her daughter learned what her grandmother had taught years earlier: *"As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people," Galatians 6:10.*

A true friend is someone who is there for you when it would be more comfortable being somewhere else.

Ed Mathews

## **Friends**

*"In still water, the face of him who looks is reflected; so we see a likeness of ourselves in others," Proverbs 27:19.* Though difficult to translate, the meaning seems clear. We gain insight into ourselves when we relate to our close friends.

True friendship is like a mirror. It shows us who we are. It echoes our thoughts, evaluates our feelings, and reacts to our intentions. True friends give us four gifts.

1. Correction. *"The wounds of a friend can be trusted," Proverbs 27:6.* Where an enemy dare not speak, a friend can give advice. Open rebuke is better than hidden love. It is a grave disservice to withhold correction.

2. Guidance. *"The pleasantness of a friend comes from (his) earnest counsel," Proverbs 27:9.* It is like perfume. It gladdens the heart, alerts the mind. When life hits a rough patch, the words of a friend fill in the potholes.

3. Comfort. *"Do not forsake your friend," Proverbs 27:10.* True friends will stick together in good and bad times. They will show their true colors when we need them most.

4. Encouragement. *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another," Proverbs 27:17.* Friends inspire holy aspirations. They encourage Christian devotion and honorable achievement. One close friend is better than thousand distant relatives.

Beth had a new brother. Mike was cute and cuddly. Beth wanted to hold him. The parents were concerned. Was she jealous? Would she hurt him? But, after days of asking, she prevailed. Beth gently hugged Mike. Then she whispered softly in his ear: *"Tell me what God is like because I am starting to forget."*

A real friend helps us get a glimpse of God.

Ed Mathews



## **Who Is The Minister?**

There is somewhere between the call of God and the response of man an individual called a minister. His is a wonderful son to his mother, a hard worker to his wife, and a caring dad to his children. His name is on the church sign. He is the spiritual guide to those who attend the congregation, I Timothy 4:6.

To some, the minister is a fuddy-duddy. To others, he is a cool guy. To most folks, he never has fun. But, to all, he is the luckiest person around (because he only works a few minutes on Sunday and Wednesday)! Notwithstanding, he is the one person around whom we must be on your best behavior.

The minister is supposed to be there when a crisis looms. He is often seeing others when illness strikes his own. He is expected to fix broken lives. He is to be a leader, a writer, a public relations director, a conflict solver, a business executive, a fundraiser, a counselor, a diplomat, a planner, and a promoter. And, through it all, he should be both humble and optimistic.

The minister feels strongly that his chief loyalty is to God. He has one of the few jobs no one wants but everyone knows how to do. He is supposed to joyfully serve those who freely criticize him. Most people do not know his struggles because he is too busy sympathizing with theirs.

The minister is many-people-rolled-into-one. We can only appreciate his work when we have walked in his shoes. He asks no pity, desires no charity. He wishes the congregation would be patient, understanding, and helpful. For, he, after all, does not have a minister!

Ed Mathews

### **How Could That Be?**

Throughout the history of Christian missions, there have been surprises. Missionaries have gone out to plant churches in (supposedly) unreached territory. But, when they arrived, they were met by believers.

Such an incident was encountered by Paul. He went “*through the interior*” (of what we now call Turkey) “*and arrived at Ephesus,*” Acts 19:1. He found “*some disciples*” there. Who converted them? We are not told.

In the late nineteenth century, missionaries in Korea were struggling to make converts. It was a complete surprise when a man from the interior knocked on the door. Sang-Yoon Suh begged the missionary, Horace Underwood, to come with him to baptize people in his isolated village. No missionary had ever been in that town. How could there be believers there?

Likewise, in 1950, when the first missionaries from the Churches of Christ went to Nigeria, they found hundreds of converts scattered among 65 congregations. How could that be?

The journey of the Gospel to this remote place is epic. The sister of the mistress of Adolph Hitler had received a correspondence course from a group of ladies in Nashville. That sister gave the course to a Nigerian who was visiting Germany. His name was C. A. O. Essein. Essein studied the lessons and accepted Christ. He wrote the ladies in Nashville for help.

Everyone in America was baffled by his request. Who was this man? How did he hear the Good News? Was he for real? In time, it was learned that that correspondence course was the beginning of one of the great success stories in modern missions.

Indeed, God can do amazing things with us (and, sometimes, without of us)!

Ed Mathews

### **Apple Of His Eye**

It is a tragedy to lose our sight. Therefore, our eyes are protected by an elaborate system of devices.

- . They are placed in deep sockets and surrounded by hard bone.
- . They are covered with lids that close when danger approaches.
- . They have lashes that capture foreign debris.
- . They have glands that wash them regularly with soothing tears.
- . They are kept from blurring by ducts that drain off excess fluid.

This unique system of protection was designed by the Creator to keep our eyes safe.

The Bible equates us with the eyes of the Lord. Regarding Israel, *"Whoever touches you,"* Jehovah said, *"touches the apple of His eye,"* Zechariah 2:8.

The phrase *"apple of the eye"* signifies a very precious relationship. The word "apple" comes from more than one Hebrew word. (1) In Deuteronomy (32:10), it renders a term that literally means *"man."* Presumably, it was referring to the reflected image of an individual in the eye of another person. (2) In Psalms (17:8), it meant *"daughter."* Likely, it had the same significance as *"man."* (3) In Proverbs (7:2), it referred to the instruction of a teacher. Obviously, when we are the *"apple of His eye,"* we are treated as something very special.

No matter how obscure or forgotten you feel, the Lord watches over you. *"Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?"* Psalms 94:9.

A precious promise He has given,  
To every weary passerby,  
On our way from earth to heaven:  
*"You are the apple of My eye."*

There is no risk in abandoning ourselves to God. He protects us like the protection of our eyes.

Ed Mathews

## **Duffy**

Duffy was eager to work. The restaurant owner was told he would do a good job. But would he? Duffy was short and overweight. He had the thick-tongued speech of a Down syndrome.

The restaurant was a truck stop. Duffy would be the bus boy. The owner was not concerned about the truckers. It was the locals that gave him trepidation. What would they think of this mentally handicapped employee?

He should not have worried. After the first week, Duffy had everyone wrapped around his stubby finger. He was twenty-two years old, proud of his job, and determined to please. His only flaw was cleaning tables before the customers were finished eating.

The owner learned that Duffy stayed with his disabled mother. They lived in public housing. Money was tight. Duffy was a half step from being sent to a group home.

Duffy never missed work. He was always on time. But, after three years, he suddenly was absent. The owner found him in the hospital. He had a serious heart problem (which many Down syndrome people develop at an early age). He made it through the surgery. The customers at the truck stop clapped and shouted at the news.

Duffy returned to work three months later. He was taken to a table piled high with donations. There was more than fifteen thousand dollars in cash and checks. All of it was from customers who missed their “buddy.” Beyond a doubt, he was the best worker the restaurant ever had.

*“... We must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’” Acts 20:35.*

Ed Mathews

### **None Like Him**

Before a meal, families often recite a simple prayer: *"God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food."* These words can easily slip off our tongue without our recognizing their significance.

1. God Is Great. There is none like Him, Jeremiah 10:6a. He is supreme in wisdom, unmatched in justice, and unrivaled in purpose. To worship a deity of mere power would be like the cringing of an oppressed slave. Such degrades the devotee by destroying his independence and crippling his courage.

2. God Is Good. Among all the deities, our Lord stands alone. He is kind to all. He is fair in His demands. He is unbiased in His judgments. Idols can *"do no harm nor can they do any good,"* cf. Jeremiah 10:5b. God is different. He is infinite. His goodness is beyond full comprehension.

3. Let Us Thank Him. There is much to be thankful for. He loves all people. He sends rain on the just and the unjust. He holds the world in His hands. He wants everyone to accept His gracious offer of salvation.

These ideas are not poetic imagination. Nor are they baseless speculation. God is a living, active deity. He is self-existent. His life is the life in which all other life is contained, Acts 17:28. Indeed, He is eternal and changeless.

Sometimes I wonder if I really know Him. But the reality of God is not determined by what I think I know about Him. It is decided by how much I have absorbed of who He said He is.

Ed Mathews

## **Resolutions**

At the end of the year, many Christians make resolutions. They often resolve to be more faithful in the cause of Christ.

Resolutions are made in good faith. They are kept with intention and carried out with enthusiasm—for a while! Most of the time they are eventually forgotten. The resolution that was so firm in January, begins to melt by March, and evaporates by May.

What is the reason for this lapse?

Jesus would likely answer this way: *“Men do not put new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the wineskins will burst, the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved,”* Matthew 9:17.

The ancient poor people in the middle east did not have glass bottles. They used baby goatskins. A new hide was flexible. It could expand as the grape juice fermented. It stretched to accommodate the increased volume of gas. But it could not be reused.

The reason many resolutions are not kept is simple. The new way of life is poured into the old patterns of living. If we desire to be more faithful, we must establish new paths for obedience. Otherwise, the resolution does not have a chance. A change in life requires an alteration in all the aspects of living that contribute to the success of that change.

The old self must be abandoned before the new self can take root. *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come,”* II Corinthians 5:17.

Let us make resolutions. But let us form new habits to fit them into our new lifestyle.

Ed Mathews

## TEXT INDEX

Acts 19:1	48	Matthew 11:28	34
Acts 20:35	50	Micah 6:8	23
II Chronicles 19:16	17	I Peter 2:9	38
Colossians 1:10	31	I Peter 2:19	26
Colossians 3:2	43	I Peter 4:10	41
Colossians 3:13	40	Proverbs 19:8	25
I Corinthians 16:2	11	Proverbs 20:24	20
I Corinthians 16:14	7	Proverbs 22:6	4
II Corinthians 7:8,9	27	Proverbs 27:19	46
II Corinthians 8:23	10	Psalms 23:5	15
		Psalms 29:2	18
Deuteronomy 29:6	3	Psalms 37:4	9
Ephesians 2:7	42	Romans 10:14	36
Exodus 11:3,6,7	28		
Galatians 6:10	45	I Thessalonians 5:18	32
Genesis 27:34	6	II Thessalonians 2:15	33
Genesis 32:24,25	22	I Timothy 4:6	47
Isaiah 55:2	14		
Isaiah 65:23	37	Zechariah 2:8	49
James 2:14	16		
James 2:18	19		
Jeremiah 10:6	51		
John 16:12	1		
John 17:20,21	24		
Joshua 23:10	30		
Joshua 25:15	5		
Luke 2:6,7	39		
Luke 9:10	8		
Luke 11:1	12		
Luke 12:35	2		
Luke 15:24	44		
Luke 24:36,37	21		
Mark 9:40	13		
Matthew 7:7	29		
Matthew 7:8	35		
Matthew 9:17	52		

## TITLE INDEX

A Bar Of Soap	45	My Cup Overflows	15
Apple Of His Eye	49		
Are We Satisfied?	14	None Like Him	51
Ask	29	No Room	39
Be Ready	2	Out Of Joint	22
Be Thankful	32		
Being Wise	25	Prayer	12
Brains Or Bricks	4	Prayer Works	35
		Press For A Decision	5
Called By God	38	Prodigal Came Home	44
Delight In The Lord	9	Resolutions	52
Do It	16		
Doing Our Part	28	Situation Obedience	36
Duffy	50	So That You May See	3
Easy Does It	1	Team Work	20
		Thanks For Nothing	26
Faith In Action	19	They Will Not Toil In Vain	37
Forgive	40	Time Out	8
Friends	46		
		Unity	24
Gathering Or Scattering	13	Use Your Gift	41
Ghosts	21		
Giving	11	Walk In The Lord	31
Going To Church	18	Who Is A Minister	47
Grace	42		
Hard Preaching	27		
He Ate And Left	6		
Hold To The Teachings	33		
How Could That Be?	48		
Just As I Am	34		
Kids Need Parents	43		
Love	7		
Making The Secular Sacred	17		
Manners	23		
Measuring The Church	30		
Missionary Myths	10		