

**CHURCH BULLETIN ARTICLES**

**Help  
for the  
Weary Traveler**

**by  
Ed Mathews**

**Volume VII**

## **A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR**

The Sunday morning church bulletin is often a neglected venue for dispersing 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 word in 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 to provide a needed spiritual boost. They are a tonic for the trek to the city foursquare. They are manna from the Bread of Life.

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

August 21, 2021

## **Voice Of An Angel**

She was a strange girl—though she could sing like an angel. She was not pretty. She was not popular.

Hattie was new in town. She was quiet. She seldom made eye contact. Her clothes were gorgeous. She never wore the same outfit twice. Everyone thought she was conceited. Little did they know.

The annual try-outs for the fall high school musical were tomorrow. Betty had had the lead part for three years. She assumed she would be the star again. But “*there are voices of humans and voices of angels,*” 1 Corinthians 13:1.

The day came. Betty did her best. Hattie got the lead. Betty was crushed. Her classmates felt she had been robbed. They ignored Hattie. She did not seem to notice. She had been snubbed before. Perhaps, she assumed that that was normal.

They rehearsed every day after school for two months. Indeed, Hattie had a great voice. She was a natural actress (though Betty never told her so). Finally, opening night arrived. The auditorium was packed. Betty was paralyzed with the jitters. Hattie remained calm.

The play went off without a hitch. The audience gave a standing ovation for twenty minutes. There were twelve curtain calls. Hattie sang three more solos. The crowd went wild. Then it was over. The lights were dimmed.

Everyone left (but Betty and Hattie). “*Hattie,*” Betty said, “*You sang like an angel!*” Hattie cried. “*That is what my mother said just before she died.*” “*Your voice is beautiful. Your heart is, too,*” Betty added. “*Thank you,*” Hattie said softly. “*I sang to my mother tonight.*”

Our greatest responsibility is choosing how we will act in any given situation.

Ed Mathews

## **Witnesses**

Jesus told His disciples to be “*witnesses*,” Acts 1:8. When they replaced Judas, the new disciple was to be a “*witness*,” too, Acts 1:22. The apostles “*testified*” to the truth of Christ, Acts 10:39-42; 13:30,31; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 John 1:1,2.

During the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord and His disciples discussed the kingdom, Acts 1:3. They wanted to know when it would come.

1. What They Asked. The disciples were interested in a future event! Jesus drew their attention back to their present assignment. They asked about what Jesus would do. Jesus told them what they must get done. It was an important clarification. They were focused on His reign. He was focused on their responsibility.

2. How They Reacted. The Lord diverted their attention away from the kingdom. “*It is not for you to know*,” He said, Acts 1:7a. Christ was clear (though not unkind). Obviously, His followers got the message. Their testimony was heard far and wide regarding what they saw and heard.

3. What They Learned. The disciples realigned their priorities. They abandoned their speculative thoughts. Instead, they became servants of the Master. They proclaimed what they experienced. They testified to the truth regarding the Son of God.

They were witnesses. They did not proclaim lofty theories or tell sentimental stories. No! They told “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” They were faithful to their commission—to be witnesses to the greatest life ever lived.

Is this not our assignment, too? Let us not get sidetracked by other concerns. We know the story. It is time to tell it.

The reward for every responsibility is in getting it done.

Ed Mathews

### **Secret Service**

People often do things to gain the admiration of others, Matthew 6:1. Indeed, we are to let our light shine before men so that they may see our good deeds, Matthew 5:16. However, good deeds are not good when they are done for show—solely for display.

Every action has both an inner and outer component. We see the outer. It may appear good. But it must come from a pure motive. For, if the source of the action is devious, the value of the deed is damaged.

Every congregation needs secret servants. These hidden helpers prefer to keep their actions anonymous. They operate behind the scenes. They are glad to do so. They like their righteousness to be done without fanfare. They are selfless citizens of the kingdom.

Secret servants:

- . Quietly provide transportation for others who have no way of getting to church.
- . Cheerfully greet visitors whether or not they are assigned to do so.
- . Happily take the communion to the ill and elderly without being asked.
- . Secretly do those little tasks that always need done.

While unnoticed, they serve. While unprompted, they make themselves useful. While un-thanked, they minister. They are the secret service. Every church needs them. God does, too. Though they do their deeds in secret, the Father will reward them openly, Matthew 6:4b.

If the motive is holy, the action is beautiful in the sight of God (though it may be simple and small). The Lord measures the sincerity of the heart rather than the size of the deed.

The essential of secret service is to keep the service secret.

Ed Mathews

### **Others Did It**

Everyone has challenges. Most believers survive. The pain may be great. But the strength from heaven is greater.

In times past, most missionaries were supposed to send their children to boarding school. The campus was hundreds—or even thousands—of miles away. The parents were separated from their kids the majority of each year. They became like distant relatives.

Jesse and Evelyn Brand were in India. They were told to send their kids to school in America. Paul was eight and Connie was six years old. *“Did they not need their parents?”* Evelyn protested. *“How can I be expected to abandon them?”* The agony was awful.

Dad and mom were torn between the call to be missionaries and the responsibility to be parents. How were they to fulfill both mandates? The grieving servants of the Lord took solace in the promise of God: *“As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you,”* Isaiah 66:13.

The dreaded day approached. Jesse and Evelyn prayed. They acknowledged their struggle. They asked for strength. They talked to Paul and Connie. The misery remained. But, at the airport, Connie said, *“It is good I am going to America. I will take care of my brother.”* And, with that, the youngsters left for school. The parents filled the emptiness in their hearts with ministry among the Indian people.

Today, the internet has replaced the boarding school. Children stay with their parents. The tears of separation are a thing of the past. Praise God! There is one less heartache for those who go overseas (though plenty still remain).

Those who say, *“I cannot do it”* are often confronted by someone doing it.

Ed Mathews

## **Guidance**

Life is not determined by mindless chance or blind fate. No! It is the purpose of God that prevails, Proverbs 19:21.

He controls the stars and manages the seasons. We live in His world. He ordains how it functions. Hence, in many things we have no choice. The believer cheerfully accepts the situations that the Lord appoints, Psalm 16:5a. And, when there is room for a decision, we seek His counsel, Psalm 16:7a.

As sheep, we need the guidance of the Shepherd. For often circumstances can cause us to lose our way. But God is faithful. He will make known to us the path of life, Psalm 16:11a.

An experienced woodsman will mark his trail when he enters a trackless forest. He will break a twig, crush a weed, or cut a branch. Those who come after him will see the traces of his passing and, if they follow his trail, will remain safe.

We, too, journey through uncharted valleys. We see His footprints. We notice His path. We follow His way. And we can be certain that where He has been we can safely go.

I am a pilgrim here below,  
Going where I have never been.  
I cannot see what is up ahead  
Nor can I tell how far away it is.

But this I know—faith will lead the way;  
And mercy will guide me home.  
Divine love will mark the path  
And take me to the King.

God promises to guide us “*to the end*,” Psalm 48:14. And, even on distant shores, His hand will “*show me the way*,” Psalm 139:10. Thankfully, He promises to “*always*” be our guide, Isaiah 58:11a.

Let Him lead—He knows the way.

Ed Mathews

### **He Paid The Price**

She was sixty years old. Her hair was white. She spoke with a heavy German accent. Golda was a Jew. She suffered in a concentration camp during World War II. Her meager ration of food led to malnutrition. Golda realized that, if she did not escape soon, she would not be strong enough to escape later.

She made careful plans. The fateful night arrived. Everything went smoothly. There was only one barrier left—the barbed wire fence. A guard saw her when she was halfway up. *“Get down or I will shoot,”* he said. Her heart sank. She hesitated. Then, dejected, she climbed down to face her fate.

The guard approached. He saw her tears. He recognized her face. *“Golda!”* he whispered. *“I’m am Wolfgang.”* They could not believe it. Golda and Wolfgang had been best friends in high school. *“Please shoot me,”* she begged. *“I cannot go back to prison.”*

*“There is everything to live for, Golda. I will let you go if you promise to learn why Jesus makes life worth living.”* *“I will,”* she answered. And, with that, she scaled the fence and disappeared into the night.

She felt guilty for making that promise. For, actually, she would have agreed to anything to get away. And, as she ran, she heard several gun shots. The other guards, realizing what Wolfgang had done, killed him.

Golda was haunted by his sacrifice. So she kept her word. *“Christ laid down His life so that I could live,”* she replied, cf. I Peter 3:18. She believed she was “saved” by two people.

God loves sacrifices—especially when they are willingly offered.

Ed Mathews



## **Weak**

David attracted a motley crew of colleagues. All of them were in distress, debt, or discontent, I Samuel 22:2. Later, he gathered more supporters. They, too, were unscrupulous, power-hungry adventurers. David realized the precariousness of his position. Though anointed king, he said, “*I am weak*,” II Samuel 3:39a.

The word “*weak*” refers to being “*faint*,” Job 23:16, or “*losing heart*,” Isaiah 7:4. In other words, David had little wiggling room to act as a king.

1. Limited. The crown rests uneasy on the head of the one who occupies the throne. The most powerful ruler cannot do everything. He is limited. Even the dictator has to be careful lest he upset his subjects.
2. Feeble. David knew his followers were “*too strong*” for him to control, II Samuel 3:39b. They were too obstinate, too self-willed. They did not sympathize with all his noble intentions. They could easily overrule his actions.
3. Distressed. David had to “walk on eggs.” His closest comrades could force him to do what he disapproved. Open conflict was a real possibility. His spirit might be willing but his circumstances made him weak.
4. Confident. In spite of the challenges, David clung to his conviction. Jehovah will “*repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds*,” II Samuel 3:39c. He was weak but God was in control.

Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He is not weak (though the world resists His will). He will reign “*till His enemies are made His footstool*,” Hebrews 10:13. His foes may have power (but not absolute power). They will try to do as they please (but fail).

The Bible says (and history verifies), though I am weak, He is strong.

Ed Mathews

## **Dedicated**

I attended the “dedication” of a new church building. It was a massive structure, a grand edifice. It did not eclipse the stately cathedrals of Europe. But, for a modern “house of God,” it was beautiful. It was supposed to “aid in worship.”

As I sat through the service, I remembered when preachers used to condemn such opulence: wall-to-wall carpet, cushioned pews, and stained glass windows. It was “a sinful extravagance, an unjustified expense.”

As a young boy, I did not know that the congregation I attended was unable to afford such things. I assumed we denied those pleasantries because they were wrong.

Now I realize that we simply rationalized our inability to have them as if they were not the will of God. We denounced our religious neighbors until our economic situation improved to the point we could afford them.

It has occurred to me that I have learned an important aspect of human nature. WE TEND TO DISPARAGE WHAT WE CANNOT HAVE. AND WE FIND REASONS WHY OTHERS SHOULD NOT HAVE THEM EITHER.

The dedication ceremony was like a regular Sunday morning service (minus the communion). Songs, prayers, scripture readings, a message (based on Psalm 127:1), another song, and a closing prayer filled up the hour. Nevertheless, the whole affair was impressive (according to human standards).

I wondered why the building needed to be dedicated. Who came up with such an idea? Is an “undedicated” building inferior to a “dedicated” one? Or is this whole discussion so much idle tomfoolery? What do you suppose the carpenter of Nazareth thinks!

Certainly, when all is said and done, it is better to do what Jesus asked than glory in what humans do.

Ed Mathews

## **The Mistake**

It was such a simple oversight. One nut the size of a dime, one little nut that was left untightened. A mistake any mechanic could make. Yet that “little” error killed seven people.

The date was 1972. The place was New Guinea. A twin engine Piper Aztec crashed shortly after take off. The plane was owned by JAARS (Jungle Aviation And Radio Service—a part of Wycliffe Bible Translators).

An inspection of the wreckage indicated that a mid-air explosion had resulted from a fine mist of gasoline escaping where a nut had not been properly fastened. The individual responsible for leaving the nut loose was devastated.

The mechanic struggled. His guilt overwhelmed him, cf. Psalm 38:4. He could not face his colleagues. He could not face himself. *“The sight of the caskets lined-up in the little jungle church haunted me,”* he said. He felt like a failure.

It took time for him to accept the forgiveness of the surviving families. It took time for him to appreciate the kindness of his friends. Everyone was so gracious. He was touched most by the pilots who continued to trust him after the accident.

Finally, he accepted the forgiveness of God. Several weeks after the tragedy, he said, *“Except for the grace of God, I would have been overcome by guilt ridden despair—the eighth victim of the Aztec crash.”*

The mechanic faced his “little” mistake that caused so much pain. He continued to serve as a JAARS aviation repairman until his retirement. *“We all make mistakes,”* he said. *“Mine made headlines!”*

The darkest night is a blessing because you can see the dimmest stars.

Ed Mathews

### **Talking To Yourself**

My wife had gone into a store to “pick up a few things.” I stayed in the car. I entertained myself by watching people.

When folks think nobody is looking, they will reveal their inmost thoughts by the expressions on their faces. On this particular day, they displayed feelings of happiness, sorrow, anxiety, fear, and determination.

One person in particular caught my eye. He was deeply engrossed in talking to himself. He was so absorbed in His conversation that he bumped into another pedestrian. I could not hear what he said. But obviously the person was both an articulate speaker and a careful listener!

This experience got me to thinking. What do people talk about when “talking to themselves?” The rich fool “*thought to himself*” about how to keep his abundant harvest, Luke 12:16,17. The prodigal son acknowledged to himself, “I am starving,” Luke 15:17. The shrewd manager “*said to himself*” what should I do now, Luke 16:3. And the unjust judge “*said to himself*” the persistent widow is wearing him out, Luke 18:2-6.

We talk to ourselves about what concerns us. These conversations reveal what is in our hearts. We are letting out what abides within. We are telling others who we are. For what we say echoes what we think.

So, when I talk to myself, what should I reveal about myself? “*Whatever is true... noble...right...pure...lovely, or admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things,*” Philippians 4:18.

Our thinking lifts us to the stars,  
Or captures up behind prison bars;  
Confers on us both joy and strife,  
For as we think we fashion life.

Ed Mathews

## **Forgiven**

The phone rang. John asked his secretary to get the number. An hour later, he returned the call. The number did not look familiar.

The voice on the other end said, "*Green Lawn Gardens. May I help you?*" The father thought that was weird. "*I am John Miller—returning your call.*" "*Oh, Mr. Miller! Just a moment.*" Shortly, Scott Miller, his son, answered. "*Thanks for calling back, dad.*"

Scott was the last person John wanted to talk to. The Miller family had been through a dozen rehab programs with Scott. He always promised to do better. And he always did—for a while. Then there would be a relapse, another disappointment.

Scott announced he had been through a marvelous rehab program. "*I met Jesus,*" Scott explained. "*What does that mean?*" the father asked. "*It means my past has been forgiven.*"

John was stunned. Had Scott really kicked his drug habit? Or had he become some religious fanatic?

Scott arrived home two weeks later. He looked great. "*I asked Jesus to be my Lord,*" he said. "*Things have not been the same since!*"

John and Silvia had not been churchgoers. It was strange to hear Scott talk so excitedly about finding a church home. The change in Scott was too dramatic to ignore. The Miller family went to a church nearby. The sermon was about the prodigal son: "*He was lost and is found,*" Luke 15:32c.

Today, fifteen years later, all of the Millers have become members of the church. Their sins are forgiven. They were lost. But now they are found.

When you move away from sin, do not leave a forwarding address.

Ed Mathews

### **The Lord Is There**

The Book of Ezekiel has a happy ending. It begins with the prophet in exile. And, after twenty-five years, he remained in captivity. Still he longed to return to his homeland, to a restored Israel. For "*The Lord is there,*" Ezekiel 48:32b.

1. Wonderful Fact. Sin had driven the Lord away. But, when Israel repented, He returned. That was not a poetic truth. It was an actual fact. God was present with His people. They were blessed by His being there.

2. Happy Condition. The Lord was present for noble purposes. He would protect His people. They would "*not fail,*" Psalms 46:5. "*I will live among them,*" the Lord said, "*I will be their God and they will be my people,*" Ezekiel 37:27.

3. Great Event. Ezekiel wrote, "*from that time,*" Ezekiel 48:35a, indicating a specific occasion, God would return. "That time" was when Israel repented. And, like Israel, our enjoying His presence begins when we repent.

4. Important Truth. His presence will draw others to His grace. We must not be ashamed of our connection with Him. What others seek we should maintain. God is in His people. We should celebrate His being in us.

His New Testament presence is far more than His Old Testament presence. In former days, He dwelled in the Most Holy Place in the temple. Back then, His glory was seen by one man, once a year. Now He dwells in each of us, every day, all year long. Let us live so that He will stay among us

Christians stand out because God lives in.

Ed Mathews

## **Law Of Life**

Biology has discovered a fundamental principle of life: *"function or die."* Living organisms are created with a purpose. But, if that purpose is not fulfilled, the organism perishes.

*"Go to the ant,...consider its ways.... It has no... overseer..., yet it stores its provisions in summer..., "* Proverbs 6:6,7. Without supervision, the ant works diligently to provide for itself. It instinctively performs its function. The ant is not conscious of the "law of life," but the result is the same.

1. The Physical Realm. Recent laboratory experiments were done on kittens. The right eye of each kitten was covered. Without light the eye stopped working. After several weeks, the eyes were examined. The optic nerve in each kitten had weakened or died. The lack of work caused the damage.

2. The Spiritual Realm. This principle also applies to our spiritual life. If we do not function, we die. For instance, *"we are the salt of the earth,"* Matthew 5:13. But, if we lose our saltiness, we are no longer able to influence others. Can we expect to remain alive when we do nothing?

Does this not explain why so many in the church are sick and dying (spiritually)? The majority who attend are spectators instead of participants.

The measure of a healthy congregation depends on how *"each part does its work,"* Ephesians 4:16. No one can grow strong when he allows others to eat for him. No one can stay alive by depending on others to do what needs to be done. It is the "law of life." Each of us is responsible for his own spiritual well being.

It is easier to do something than explain why nothing is done.

Ed Mathews

### **On His Knees**

Shimeta Neesima was born on February 12, 1843 in Japan. His family practiced Shintoism. The Shinto religion emphasized respect for the national government and local authority. It required food sacrifices to the village god—who served as the guardian of those who fed him.

When Neesima was a teenager, he went to a military academy. He learned Chinese. While in the library, he discovered a Chinese Bible. He began to read it: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,”* Genesis 1:1.

Shintoism says little about the supreme deity and nothing about creation. The Bible intrigued him. He read it every chance he got. It answered a question he had long wondered about: *“Where did everything come from?”*

So began a long search for his Maker. He was determined to find the God of the Bible. But no one wanted to discuss the idea of God or creation. So Neesima prayed.

At the age of twenty-one, he left the military school. And, under the cover of night, boarded a ship bound for Boston. A believer in Christ owned the vessel. He helped Neesima attend Andover Theological Seminary. The former Shinto graduated in 1874.

The following year, Joseph Hardy Neesima (the first two names were those of his benefactor) returned to Japan. He started Doshia Christian College in Kyoto. His motto was: *“Let us advance on our knees.”* During the next twenty-five years, over one hundred graduates become ministers of the Gospel. Christian missionaries were banned from entering Japan in those days! In Neesima, God found another way.

Our prayers only go as far as our heart is willing to follow.

Ed Mathews



### **Give What You Got**

Christianity has a price tag. God gave His Son. It cost Jesus His life. And we are asked to give sacrificially, too.

Years ago a widow in Mexico told this story. She attended every service of the church. Often she prayed, *“Lord accept what I am able to give.”*

One morning, during worship, she repeated that prayer. She had a peso in her purse—her bus fare home. Inez lived six kilometers from the church building. She was no longer able to walk that far.

For some reason, she was moved to put her bus money in the collection plate. Inez gave all she had. At the close of the service, some visitors found out she lived two blocks from their home. And, to her surprise, they invited her to ride with them.

Inez praised the Lord. She gave God her bus money. He provided a free “taxi” ride. This experience led her to continue giving what she had. The Lord never failed her. For the next six years, until her sudden passing, she always had a ride home.

It is not what I could do,  
Should riches be my lot,  
It is what I can do  
With the pennies that I got.

Jesus said, *“Give and it will be given to you,”* Luke 6:38. That certainly was what Inez learned. She did not have much. But she laid up her pesos in heaven.

Perhaps, our life is uneventful because we have not “risked our ride home.” Until we live in faith, God may not prove His faithfulness. He made the first move. He is waiting for us to follow His lead.

Love is never afraid of giving too much.

Ed Mathews

## **A Plan**

She had just delivered a baby girl. The child seemed normal at first. But, over the next few weeks, it was clear something was wrong. The doctor finally said, *"Your daughter has a brain defect. She will likely be retarded."*

The devastating news was received on the second anniversary of her wedding. The young mother was flooded with questions. What does the future hold? Will her marriage survive? Will her daughter ever become an adult?

A year earlier, she had visited with her neighbor. The neighbor had a son without an arm. That conversation ended with the woman saying, *"God has a plan for my son,"* cf. Jeremiah 29:11.

The neighbor seemed so confident. And a year later, that confidence was as strong as ever. *"God has a plan for your little girl,"* she said. *"Just wait. You will see."*

The young wife and her husband moved to another subdivision. Years passed. The relationship with the mother of the one armed boy ended. From time to time, the younger woman wondered how the boy turned out.

The girl grew into a lovely young woman. Her retardation was minimal. Most people never noticed. Her grades in high school and college did not earn her academic honors. But she was voted most popular girl.

On a beautiful June afternoon, three weeks after graduating from college, she married her handsome prince—a one armed man. The neighbor was right. God had a plan for her son. And it included marrying a slightly retarded princess.

Our job is to do what is possible. God will take care of what is impossible.

Ed Mathews

### **Staring At Each Other**

The family of Jacob was chosen to inherit Canaan. And, as children of God, we are chosen to live in heaven. However, none of the chosen are exempt from facing the hardships of this world.

1. The Situation. Canaan was suffering a severe drought. Famine spared no one. But there was food in Egypt. Upon hearing that news, the sons of Jacob “*kept looking at each other*,” Genesis 42:1. They stared in disbelief. We also gawk at the promise of a mansion above.

2. The Exhortation. Jacob told his boys to go to Egypt. “*Go down there and buy some (grain)...so that we may live*,” Genesis 42:2. God helped. Yet they were expected to help themselves. The Lord provided the grain. They had to go get it.

The famine was part of a bigger picture. It was a link in the chain of history.

1. The Lesson. Our life is more than finding food. We have a soul. The body shouts about its needs. The soul whispers, “*Me, too!*” Until we gain insight into our spiritual existence, we remain blind to reality.

2. The Insight. We desperately search for a plea that will avail in the judgment. In vain, we believe that a promise to do better will suffice. None of it works. Without Christ, we are not ready to meet our Maker.

The boys of Jacob bought what was available. We, too, must secure what has been provided. Christ was chosen “*before the creation of the world*,” I Peter 1:20. Why should we continue to stare at each other?

Looking ahead is a good way to keep from falling behind.

Ed Mathews

## **Giving**

Two wealthy Christians were visiting Korea. They saw a father pulling and his son pushing a plow. *"They must be poor,"* the visitors said. *"Yes, they are,"* the missionary replied. *"When we were constructing our church building, they sold their ox to support the effort."* *"That must have been a huge sacrifice."* *"No.! They felt fortunate to have the ox to sell."*

Most of us get uneasy when missionaries tell us stories about the poverty of the local people. We wonder if we are doing enough. When we read about the poor renouncing all they have, we feel a tinge of admiration and a bucket of guilt. But, somehow, the feelings pass. We soon forget all about it. We move on.

Missionaries face the same dilemma. They supposedly give up all they have. They go overseas. They live among the poor. Yet they receive travel expenses, a regular salary, a car allowance, and retirement funds. They are reminded daily that they actually gave up little.

It is not easy to answer how much we should give. Jesus said, *"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple,"* Luke 14:33. What did He mean? Could it be He wants us to abandon our sense of ownership?

This concept goes beyond what we put in the collection plate. Surely our Sunday contribution is not all we should give! Surely we are not free to enjoy all the rest for ourselves! Surely, above all, He wants us!

No matter how much I give, I am always in debt to Him who gave His all.

Ed Mathews

### **Doing Our Best**

Back in the day, when tent meetings were common, a village in the northwest had planned their spring revival. Churchgoers and non-churchgoers usually attended these affairs. It was a community event.

In 1906, America was swept by a spiritual renewal. People suddenly got religion. Saloons saw a major decrease in business. Houses of ill repute closed. Jails were empty. Christianity was on the march. It was an exciting time.

A well-known evangelist was scheduled to preach in the Gospel Meeting. A week before the scheduled event was to begin the evangelist had to cancel. He was ill. The little church was devastated.

The congregation met to determine their next move. After considerable discussion, the saints decided their preacher should step in. He appreciated their confidence but felt completely unable. *"Do the best you can,"* the congregation said. *"We will bring the visitors."*

And they did. Every afternoon the faithful met to pray. Then they went throughout the town inviting people to come. Every member got involved. Anticipation ran high. Attendance was off the chart. The success of the revival was unprecedented. And, year after year, spring religious meetings were held until the beginning of the First World War.

The little village still recalls these revivals as the "Pentecost of Piperville." They have an annual "Joel 2:29 Parade" to celebrate the memory of those tent meetings.

The stirring of the Spirit was a great experience. It is no longer a present reality. Revivals are a thing of the past. Now the town has a village potluck picnic. Games are played. But God is forgotten.

What does Piperville tell us?

We must do our best. God will do the rest!

Ed Mathews

## **Contentment**

The secret to contentment is to accept things as they are. Paul said, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,"* Philippians 4:11. Amen! *"Godliness with contentment is great gain,"* 1 Timothy 6:6.

Paul did not need much. He believed, *"if we have food and clothing we should be content,"* 1 Timothy 6:8. In other words, let us be *"happy with what we have,"* Hebrews 13:5.

While a student in Florida, I worked with a church in Cypress Gardens. The place was known for its stunning beauty. However, full-blown poverty was hidden just behind the famous tourist attraction.

While making visits Sunday afternoon, I came across a dilapidated shack. It was a tiny two-room dwelling. The screens were torn. The stairs were broken. The weeds had taken over.

An old man was reading on the front porch. *"What are you reading?"* I asked. *"The Holy Book,"* the man answered. His eyes lit up. A toothless smile framed his wrinkled face. *"What are you reading in the Good Book?"* *"I am reading about my mansion in the sky! It is going to be wonderful,"* he said. And, with a faraway look, he added, *"I do not mind a few years of nothing for an eternity of everything!"*

He was content.

I have never forgotten that short conversation. His joy in the midst of poverty was contagious. Many times since that day I have felt ashamed for being discontent. His attitude, his smile, and his joy are etched in my mind. And so is a vision of him in his mansion above.

We NEED so little. Our troubles begin when we WANT too much.

Ed Mathews

## **My Daddy**

A little girl was standing at the back of the building. Her daddy was up front. He was telling the crowd what Jesus had done in his life. *"If the Lord can rescue a drunk like me, He can rescue you, too,"* he said.

A skeptic had wandered into the church. He could not listen to such "religious nonsense." *"Why don't you sit down? You are just dreaming!"*

Soon the heckler felt a tug on his sleeve. It was the little girl. *"Sir,"* she said, *"it is my daddy you called a dreamer. He used to beat my mother. He drank so much there was little left for food and clothes. But look at him now. He is sober. And he has a good job. So, if my daddy is dreaming, please don't wake him up!"*

Like James said, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above,"* James 1:17.

Tommy was not doing well in school. His daddy had just left his mother. The disruption had sent the boy into a tailspin.

The teacher invited the mother and father to a parent-teacher conference. The mother arrived first. The father came soon after. They politely ignored each other.

The teacher carefully gave a detailed account of Tommy's behavior (including his school work). Then the teacher shared with the parents an essay Tommy had written. The essay was composed of one sentence.

The mother read it. Then the father read it. Tears flowed. Hugs followed. The anguished words of a little boy mended a broken home.

The sentence would break the heart of any father. It was the outpouring of a young child's troubled heart.

DADDY. PLEASE COME HOME.

Ed Mathews

### **More Than Enough**

Israel was asked to give in order to build the tabernacle. They were generous, Exodus 36:3. They were so generous the workers begged them to stop bringing their gifts, Exodus 36:4,5.

1. Too Little. If the collection had been too little, the sanctuary may have remained unfinished. Or, desirable, even necessary, items would have been omitted. If the gifts had been too little, the project could have come to a halt before it was completed. God would have been dishonored. The people would have been embarrassed. And the neighbors would have laughed.

2. Too Much. Since the Israelites gave too much, Moses issued a “cease and desist” order. In history, that is rare. But it happened. They remembered their slavery. They saw the miracle at the Red Sea. They knew God was faithful. What an example! The people brought more than enough to do the work the Lord had commanded.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two little kids stood at the front door. Their clothes were rags. They quietly waited in the snow. An old lady opened the door. She invited the children into her living room. She knew them. They lived down the street in a plywood hovel.

*“You must be cold,”* she said. The youngsters did not respond. *“Come...let me get you something warm to drink.”* She made them hot cocoa. The children held the cup and saucer like it was fine china. *“You must be rich,”* one of them said. *“Your cups match your saucers.”*

After the snack, the lady bid them “goodbye.” She tidied up the dishes. A cup and saucer was left on the kitchen table. It reminded her of how “rich” she was.

Ed Mathews



## **Attending Church**

A man had been absent from church for many years. Suddenly he attended a Sunday service. He was not sure why.

The members were kind. He felt welcome. But, when asked to return, he did not commit himself.

The man had not been sick. He had not moved away. He just quit coming. He had no reason for his absence. Neither did he have a compelling reason to attend. He was there simply out of curiosity.

1. Why Come Together? Why does the Lord insist that we attend church? He asks us to “*seek first the kingdom of God,*” Matthew 6:33. The members of the original Body of Christ faithfully devoted themselves to the fellowship of one another, Acts 2:42. We are to see that no one “*turns away from the living God.*” We are to “*encourage each other daily,*” Hebrews 3:12,13. If a person is going to miss heaven, one of the best ways is to miss church.

2. Why Stay Away? People become careless about attending the assembly for many reasons. No doubt, the main cause is their love for God grows cold. Devotion becomes lukewarm. It is assumed the Lord will save in spite of a shallow faith. Yet, even if one has his name on the church membership roll, that is no guarantee that a place is reserved for him in the bright beyond. Like a soldier who is AWOL, so the one absent from church will have to confront his Commanding Officer.

It is not our place to judge those who fail to attend church. However, we need the church. The church needs us. And the world needs both.

Ed Mathews

### **Darkness To Light**

John White Feather was a Navaho Indian. He grew up in Arizona. He believed in many gods. They ruled every aspect of his life. His grandfather and father were medicine men. John followed in their footsteps.

As a young adult, John was immersed in Spiritism. He communicated with the ethereal world through a crystal stone. He conducted peyote ceremonies (which used peyote cactus to induce hallucinations). In these altered, mental states, John thought he received guidance from the gods.

Morning Glory was the wife of John. She was a Christian. Her influence eventually led him to Christ. It was a long and difficult road. John did not easily set aside his peyote practices.

But, when John became seriously ill, he was forced to rethink his ways. The physician was unable to heal himself! He had tried to be both a medicine man and a believer in the Great Physician. The combination did not work. God demanded his complete allegiance.

Finally, in 1982, John renounced his pagan ways. He made a decision to follow Jesus. This upset his fellow Navaho Indians. But his decision was his decision. He did not turn back.

John burned his "sacred tools." It was a sobering experience. *"Are the gods going to attack me?"* he wondered. That disturbing question was countered with an encouraging answer: *"I was once darkness but now I am light in the Lord Jesus Christ," Ephesians 5:8.*

In the years since turning to God, John has been a missionary to several Native American tribes in Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. He has *"nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness."* Instead, he exposes them, Ephesians 5:11.

Ed Mathews

## **Quit Complaining**

The children of Israel were a bunch of complainers. Within hours of leaving Egyptian slavery, they grumbled at God, Exodus 14:10-12. Sadly, things have not changed. We gripe, too.

Christians are told to “*do everything without complaining*,” Philippians 2:14. But the pews are packed with disgruntle folks. No matter what the congregation does, some people are unhappy, irritated, and quarrelsome.

The Bible leaves no room for such behavior. It is childish and immature. The world does not tolerate whining. Why should the church?

If our conversations were recorded, what would we hear? Likely, the playback would be embarrassing. We would be surprised at how much we fuss.

Youngsters object to doing their “homework.” Mom protests having to “keep the house tidy.” And dad grouses about his “inconsiderate boss.” Where is the joy? Where is the gratitude? Unhappiness is the fruit of a gloomy outlook. Character is what we are under pressure.

If people are not happier because they are Christians, it is questionable whether they are really Christians! Let us learn to walk through life with a smile even when things are not as we would like them.

And, if we do not like something, change it. If we cannot change it, then change the way we look at it. Complaining improves nothing. It spoils everything. The people of God must “*always give thanks for everything*,” Ephesians 5:20; cf. Colossians 3:17.

It is usually not the depth of our trouble but the shallowness of our gratitude that causes us to complain.

Ed Mathews

### **The Pearl**

Ravi was a pearl diver. The local missionary often visited him. Whenever Ravi was asked to accept Christ, he refused. *"The Christian way is too easy. I want to earn my place in heaven,"* he would answer.

After years of rejecting the grace of God, Ravi finally made a decision. *"I am going to crawl to Delhi,"* he said. *"But Delhi is 900 miles away!"* In typical Hindu fashion, the pearl diver replied, *"the suffering will be sweet. However, before I begin my journey, I want to give you a gift,"* Ravi told the missionary.

Years earlier, Swahe, the son of Ravi, who was also a pearl diver, had found the "perfect pearl." That prize had cost the son his life. While discovering the priceless gem, the boy stayed under water too long.

"Ravi," the missionary said, *"I will buy the pearl."* "No!" Ravi objected, *"This pearl is beyond price. No one has enough money to pay for it. It is a gift."* "But I must pay for it," the missionary insisted. The pearl diver was frustrated. *"You do not understand. My son gave his life to get this pearl. It is not for sale. It is a gift."*

"Ravi," the missionary said, *"that is what I have been telling you about the love of God. You cannot buy it. You cannot earn it. It is a gift."*

Suddenly, Ravi grasped the truth. *"The Christian way is really free,"* he admitted. *"It is a gift. I will never deserve it—regardless of how much I do."*

We must praise the glorious grace of God which is "freely" given, Ephesians 1:6.

Ed Mathews

## **Touchstones**

A “touchstone” is a test for determining the genuineness of something. Therefore, trials are the touchstone of a believer. The depth of our faith is measured by the temptation to doubt.

Israel had every reason to trust God. They had seen His miracles. They had heard His promises. But, when the chips were down, would they pass the test?

As soon as they left Egypt, they confronted their touchstone: the army of Pharaoh, Exodus 14:10. Moses announced the test. “*The Lord will fight for you: you need only be still,*” Exodus 14:14. The word *still*” is also rendered “*hold your peace,*” “*remain calm,*” or “*do not lift a finger.*”

The offspring of Jacob failed the test. They panicked. The Lord told them to “*move on,*” Exodus 14:15. Moses kept his faith. Israel lost hers.

Why does Jehovah send touchstones?

1. Honor The Faithful. Those who pass the test are blessed by heaven. They gain a good reputation. They are recognized for their achievement. When believers hang on—and refuse to give in—God will reward their tenacity with a “*well done good and faithful servant!*”

2. Warn The Doubtful. Shallow faith can often go undetected. And, unless a touchstone is applied, even the doubter may remain self-deceived. While imagining himself to have faith, he may have little-to-none. The consequences of such ignorance have eternal ramifications.

Jehovah abhors pretense. He hates make-believe. “*There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, nothing concealed that will not be made known,*” Luke 8:17. Our darkest secrets will be revealed. He sends touchstones in order to save.

True faith will lift us above false hope.

Ed Mathews

## **Uncle T**

Poor uncle T sat in the living room with a blank look on his face. The family was aware that he worked long hours. But his demise came quickly.

It sounds terrible—yet it is true—we are glad uncle T is gone. He was a nuisance. We welcomed him into our house and have not had a moment of peace since he arrived.

Uncle T taught our kids to use bad language. He showed them pornographic pictures. He made illicit sex appear normal. Uncle T suggested that whiskey, beer, and wine were good for them. He even sanctioned smoking and taking drugs.

Uncle T loved to talk. He kept the family entertained. He fascinated dad for hours. And mom listened to his noise endlessly. Therefore, set-down meals were neglected and family time was discontinued. In the end, he contributed to the abandoning of Bible study, group devotionals, and prayer time. In other words, uncle T poked his nose where it did not belong.

All of this is not to say that he was totally bad. Actually, his presence was a mixed bag. He captured our imagination but questioned the truth of Christianity. He kept us informed of world events but talked us into buying things we did not need.

Now all is quiet. Uncle T is gone. Everyone is happier. However, with a few dollars, we could replace him. Then the nonsense would begin all over again! For television captivates us in our home by people we should not invite into our house.

The Bible says, “*Get rid of all moral filth,*” James 1:21.

Ed Mathews

### **Dare To Pray**

Hudson Taylor, who later organized the China Inland Mission, was preparing to go overseas. He had been assigned to work in the slums of London.

One night, he was asked by a man to come and pray for his sick wife. The man said he had asked a priest, but the clergyman required a payment the man could not afford. Actually, the man did not even have money to buy groceries.

Taylor agreed to go. Immediately, his conscience bothered him. For, though Taylor was poor, he had money for food. Indeed, the coin in his pocket was large enough to feed a family for several days. *"If only I had a smaller coin,"* he thought, *"I could share it with these poor people."*

Taylor arrived at the ram-shackled shanty. He entered a dingy room. A pale woman was lying on a dirty bed. She looked to be sixty years old (though she was only thirty-two).

Hudson fell to his knees. He was uncomfortable. *"How dare I pray for a blessing from heaven to fall on this suffering soul when I refuse to share my money with her!"* he thought.

Taylor felt like a hypocrite. He asked the Lord to do what he himself refused to do. He said a quick pray (as the man had requested). But his words mocked God.

When Hudson finished his prayer, he cried. The man asked him what was wrong. *"A godless man dare not come before God,"* he answered, cf. Job 13:16. The man was confused. Taylor reached into his pocket and gave all his money to the poor family.

Always be kinder than necessary.

Ed Mathews

## **Getting Older**

For many people, getting old is a scary thought. They do not relish the idea. Neither did the psalmist appear to be a fan of aging. “*Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone,*” Psalm 71:9. And, again, he said, “*Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God,*” Psalm 71:18.

A man in a nursing home wrote this prayer about old age:

*“Lord, though I continue to advance in years, keep me from getting old. I do not want to be a burden. Help me to refrain from thinking I have all the answers. Make me thoughtful rather than stubborn, cheerful rather than bossy. Allow me to give advice when asked, but let my counsel reflect Your will. May I not live in the past but look forward to the future. And, with each passing day, may I grow sweeter. Let me grow old without being old. Though outwardly I am perishing, may I inwardly be renewed each day. In Jesus name, Amen.”*

We must not let what we cannot control interfere with what we can do.

The idea of living a long life appeals to everyone—as long as we do not get old and feeble. The trick is to keep having birthdays without acting like it. In other words, we can always remain young on the inside. After all, how old would we be if we did not let how old we are determine our behavior?

Old age is a time of discovery. We must find out for ourselves—otherwise it will not be a discovery!

Ed Mathews



**Who Am I?**

Can you guess my name?

I was born in 1725. I died in 1807. The only godly person in my life was my mother. She died when I was seven. I was sent to a military school. Discipline was harsh. I left the school when I was ten. A year later I became an apprentice seaman.

I gave myself to sin. In desperation, I joined the military. But, unwilling to obey the rules, I finally deserted. A few months later, I was captured and publicly beaten. I escaped to Africa where I renewed my pact with the devil.

When down and out, I was befriended by a slave trader. He treated me like his servant. Unable to take his hateful action, I fled to the coast. I built a fire hoping to attract a passing ship. I did. The skipper was surprised that I was a skilled seaman. The ship was a slave ship. I helped bring many slaves to England and America.

On numerous occasions, I dodged death. Sex, drunkenness, and brutality were my constant companions. My life was miserable. And, in response, I made others miserable.

While intoxicated, I fell overboard. I could not swim. The captain harpooned me in order to haul me back on board. I was left with a scar in my side bigger than my fist. I almost died. I lay bruised and bleeding for days. It was then that I remembered my mother. I begged God to deliver me. He did.

I married my childhood sweetheart, became a minister, and wrote a famous hymn. My name is John Newton. The hymn is "Amazing Grace." Indeed, "*He rescues and He saves,*" Daniel 6:27.

Ed Mathews

## **Pardon Me**

Naaman was a commander in the Syrian army. He was held in high esteem by the king, II Kings 5:1a. One of his duties was to accompany the aged monarch to the pagan temple of Rimmon, II Kings 5:18.

1. Faith Of The New Believer. Naaman became a believer, II Kings 5:15. He intended to worship no other god but God, II Kings 5:17b. This was a huge step. Was he faithful? We do not know. However, his newfound faith left him with a major dilemma: Should he still take the king to the heathen temple?

2. Request Of The Recent Convert. Naaman asked Elisha for two things. (a) Some soil from Israel, II Kings 5:17a. Likely, he wanted to build an altar in Syria. It was commonly thought that a god could be worshipped only on the soil of the nation that honored that deity. And (b) a pardon for going to the pagan temple, II Kings 5:18a. He did not want to anger God.

3. Answer Of The Venerable Prophet. Elisha said, "*Go in peace,*" II Kings 5:19a. These words are equivalent to saying, "*Goodbye.*" Did Elisha allow Naaman to do whatever the new convert thought best? We do not know. At that time, Jews did not convert Gentiles. The question of Naaman was as strange to the prophet as his answer is to us!

Perhaps, the whole story is a challenge to Israel. Naaman worshipped Jehovah. Should not Israel learn to do the same? And is this not what we should learn from this story, too?

The time has come when we should worship "*in spirit and in truth,*" John 4:21.

Ed Mathews

## **Haste**

There are times when hurrying is appropriate. The Israelites were to eat the Passover in “*haste*,” Exodus 12:11. We want the Lord to “*come quickly*,” Psalm 70:1. And, believers ought to “*hasten*” to keep the commands of God, Psalm 119:60. In these contexts, hurry is good.

But, haste can be bad. For instance, it is not good to hurry and miss the way, Proverbs 19:28. Nor is it prudent to be “*hasty*” in heart, Ecclesiastes 5:12. For “*haste*” in selecting church leaders can lead to disaster, I Timothy 5:22.

It is wise, then to know when haste helps and when it hinders.

A visitor attended church. He came hungry for answers. And, it seemed, his spiritual emptiness was about to be filled. He could not wait.

The minister finished his appeal. Everyone stood. A hymn was sung. It mentioned a loving God. And, for a moment, the visitor felt like he was being called. He knew he needed a Savior. Indeed, he was about to respond.

The guest had a lump in his throat. Yet he became distracted. There was a quiet commotion. He realized most people were not paying any attention to the invitation.

The visitor could not believe it. Parents were asking their kids to gather their toys. Mothers were cleaning up the crumbs. Dads were collecting books and crayons. Others were putting on shoes and straightening hair. The plea to answer the call did not seem important.

Everyone was in a hurry. Suddenly the visitor was, too. He left quickly—alone and lost. He was lost because it did not seem important to be saved.

Undue hurry can be as harmful as unnecessary procrastination.

Ed Mathews

## New

Dr. Thomas Hale was a physician. He wanted to go to Nepal—a country closed to missionaries. Since he was a doctor, Hale was allowed to enter.

Thomas Hale resolved to be more than a doctor. He quietly proclaimed Jesus. *“Dispensing medicine does not give hope for eternity,”* he said. But *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old is gone; the new has come!”* II Corinthians 5:17.

Dr. Hale witnessed this remarkable transformation.

Chandra Badhadru was a young boy. He had dropped out of school to help his widowed mother tend their small farm. While high up in a tree, gathering leaves to feed the cattle, Badhadru had a seizure. He fell sixty feet. Amazingly, he survived.

Dr. Hale did all he could. The damage was done. Badhadru was confined to a wheelchair. He lost hope. Depression set in. He saw no reason to live. The medical missionary gave Badhadru a Nepali New Testament. Within days, Chandra changed! He wore a constant smile. He was full of life. In short, he was a new person. *“I am thankful I fell,”* he said.

Chandra learned to type. He studied accounting. And, in time, became the business manager for the hospital where Dr. Hale practiced. Years later, Badhadru became a leader in the local church. Everyone marveled at his changed life. He demonstrated the power of God over impossible odds. Chandra was truly a *“new creature.”*

A “new person” is not a coat of paint covering the old person. It is an entire putting off the former self. It is a complete putting on of a new person—Jesus Christ.

Ed Mathews

### **He Is Mine**

King George VI and his wife visited Washington D.C. in 1939. President Roosevelt was honoring an Indian chief. The King and Queen attended the ceremony. What happened next shocked everyone.

The chief, without telling anyone, sang the British national anthem. And, before the president could regain control of the proceedings, the chief sang the hymn that says: *"I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold."*

When the chief finished the hymn, he asked the royals if they believed in the Lord. *"Oh, yes,"* the queen replied. *"Some admit there is a God. Some know something about Jesus. But I have them both here in my heart."* And, the king added, with a smile, *"We would rather have Him than silver or gold!"*

What a scene! The monarchs openly confessed their faith in the Lord. It took everyone by surprise. There was no ifs, ands, or buts about it. There was no hedging, no qualifying, no back peddling. Their statement of belief was clear and strong. Just like Paul, they "knew whom they believed," II Timothy 1:12.

We must stop analyzing our feelings about religion. We must quit rationalizing our faith. It is time to rest in confidence knowing what we believe and to whom we give our allegiance.

I claim Him. He claims me.  
So I celebrate the victory.  
Though I am far from worthy  
He washes me thoroughly;  
It is not just me.  
He is mine and I am His.

The Lord came. He asked me to trust Him. There is nothing more to say.

Ed Mathews

## **Reconciled**

As a person who served time, he knew what it was like behind bars. He had spent most of his life in prison (as an inmate or as a chaplain).

During a trip to Brazil, Charles Colson visited an unusual jail. Formerly a government facility, it was operated by Prison Fellowship. It was run on the Christian principles of love for God and respect for man.

There were only two staff members. The inmates did the work. The prison population was made up of robbers and murderers. Each inmate was assigned a prisoner to whom he was accountable. In addition, each prisoner was given a volunteer mentor from the outside (who worked with one inmate while incarcerated and after his release).

When Colson visited the prison, the 730 inmates were busy and happy. The facility was clean. The walls were decorated with Bible verses. Only 4 percent returned after their release (compared to 73 percent in the rest of the Brazilian prison system).

What made the difference?

Colson saw the answer when his prison guide escorted him to a solitary confinement cell. It was the only one in the prison. *"Are you sure you want to go in?"* the guide asked. *"Of course,"* Colson replied. Slowly the door swung open. And, there in the center of the windowless room, was Christ on the cross. *"He is doing time for the rest of us,"* the guide whispered.

Once alienated from God, because of our evil behavior, we are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son, cf. Colossians 1:21,22.

Jesus carried a cross so we could wear a crown.

Ed Mathews

## **Suspicion**

David fled from Saul, I Samuel 27:1. He lived among the Philistines. From this safe haven, he made war on various desert tribes, I Samuel 27:8. But he covered up his actions by lying, I Samuel 27:10,11.

Later, when the Philistines attacked Israel, David was not trusted. He and his men were sent back to Philistine territory, I Samuel 29:4.

1. Sting Of Suspicion. David was hurt. Though he must have seen the legitimacy of their thinking, the pain of rejection was a tough pill to swallow. Perhaps, he was not trusted because he lied. Happy are those who do not leave room for puzzling ambiguities.

2. Question Of Trust. “*What have I done?*” David asked, I Samuel 29:8. He thought he had been a faithful servant. It is important to fulfill our responsibilities. There is great loss in neglecting to do so. Even “minor” indiscretions can turn into “major” headaches.

3. Influence Of Good. The rulers of the Philistines recognized his righteousness. “*I know you have been as pleasing in my sight as an angel of God,*” one of them said, I Samuel 29:9. It is hard to over estimate the value of loyalty in our broken world!

4. Concealment Of Hurt. “*Why cannot I go and fight?*” David protested. It appears he was prepared to prove himself. But was he? His general response is hard to read. Was he concealing his true sentiment? Sincere intentions reside as much in truth as in falsehood.

David put himself in an ambiguous position. He learned that good judgment did not come solely from his own reasoning.

Ed Mathews

### **While She Could**

Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, John 12:3. She was “*rebuked harshly*,” Mark 14:5b. Christ said she had done a beautiful thing “*while she could*,” Mark 14:8. In effect, Mary had given flowers before the funeral.

Her deed has been called “the extravagance of love.” Likely, her extravagance helped the Lord endure Calvary. She gave when it counted most (while the recipient was still alive). Its value was its timely expression.

What are kind gestures to the dead?  
Or loving words to the deceased?  
Nothing will be heard after they pass.  
So say your piece before they are gone!

Joseph of Arimathea was an honorable man. He was also a disciple of Jesus. But, for fear of the Jews, he did not defend the Messiah. He held back when he should have stepped forward. How did he feel when Christ was crucified? He did not consent to His death (though he did not openly champion His cause).

Nevertheless, he boldly asked for His body. He buried Him in his tomb. Jesus wanted room within His heart but only found it in his grave! He, who hesitated to associate with Him in life, became identified with Him in His death.

Belated kindness and postponed gratitude are all too common. They cost so little yet mean so much. Why procrastinate? Why wait? Why withhold? Share it now—before time runs out.

Mary anointed the Lord before His burial. He saw the beauty of her compassion. He smelled the fragrance of her perfume. She shared her love “*while she could*.” Is this not an example we should follow?

An unspoken kindness becomes a cruel silence.

Ed Mathews



### Delay

Makwae was the queen of Nahlolo. She reigned in what is now Zambia. Makwae heard the Gospel from Francois Coillard. Coillard arrived there in 1878.

Queen Makwae was a powerful ruler. She subdued her enemies on all sides. During his first audience with the queen, the missionary was shocked by her cruelty. *"I have utterly destroyed my adversaries,"* she admitted. *"Their bones are bleaching in the sun. They pled for mercy. I gave them none. I threw their bodies in the field for the buzzards to eat. That was my mercy!"*

Still she eagerly listened to the Christian message (though she showed no sign of accepting it). Instead, she blamed Coillard for bringing disease and death to her people.

When the wife of Francois died in 1892, the queen sent a delegation of high-ranking officials to her funeral. Later, she invited Francois to live in Nahlolo. He secretly questioned her motive. *"I do not think she yearns to accept the Good News. Rather a white missionary is a trophy to increase her prestige."* Nevertheless, he moved to Nahlolo.

Coillard planted a church. The queen became a regular attendee. But she showed no sign of converting. Then, out of the blue, in 1916, she asked to speak to the congregation after the Sunday morning worship.

Makwae admitted she was not a Christian (though she was interested). Coillard encouraged her to make a decision. *"In just a very little while, He (Jesus) will come without delay,"* Hebrews 10:27. But the queen continued to wait.

At last, in 1920, after forty-two years of procrastination, she confessed, *"I believe."* She died a few months later!

In the town of "wait," there often stands the house of "never."

Ed Mathews

### **Rewards Of Kindness**

A little girl attempted to help her mother. She was embroidering a handkerchief. The little girl “finished” the needlework. She did the best she could.

Later, the mother discovered the crude results of her well-intended daughter. The mother cried. The work of the little girl was a beautiful expression of kindness.

Her effort was like our work. We do the best we can. But our attempt is crude at best—bungled and amateurish. Still our Father sees the motive behind it. He reads our intentions.

*“Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and expose the motives of men’s hearts. In due time, each will receive his praise from God,” I Corinthians 4:5.*

\* \* \* \* \*

A young boy lay dying. The lad was only eighteen. “*Are you afraid to die?*” the nurse asked. “*No,*” he replied, “*but what will I say to Jesus when I meet Him? I never had time to do anything for Him.*” “*Why do you say that,*” the nurse inquired. “*My parents died when I was twelve. I tried to do what they did in caring for my younger siblings. But I had no time left to serve my Savior.*” The nurse took his calloused hands in hers and said, “*I would not say anything. Just show Him your hands!*”

Do what we can for the Master. Our deeds may seem insignificant but God sees our intentions. And, in due time, we will receive praise from the Father.

If we honor Him here, He will praise us there.

Ed Mathews

### **Saving Grace**

Molly was a widow, a devout Christian. Sally was a loud-mouthed sinner. The two could not have been more different. Their only connection was Jake. He was the son of Molly. Sally and Jake were living together (though not married).

Sally did not take Molly seriously. Jake could care less. There they were—worlds apart but occasionally brought together. Molly was kind. Sally tolerated her. Jake remained distant.

As time passed, Sally softened. Molly invited her to church. After months of excuses, Sally relented. She hoped to earn some “brownie points.”

She had never attended church. She did not know what to expect. The message hit her like a “ton of bricks.” Jesus died for her, Romans 5:8. She almost cried. She held back the tears to preserve her tough-lady image.

The love of God would not let her go. She tried to dismiss the thought but it would come right back.

Sally accepted the Lord. Molly was overjoyed. Jake was skeptical. “*What will this do to our arrangement?*” he wondered. The answer came soon enough. Sally moved out. Jake was furious. Molly supported her decision. She prayed for Sally. She gave her plenty of room to grow.

Sally made many changes. She quit drinking. She stopped cussing. Little by little God shined through. Her old self died.

Jake saw the difference. He gave himself to God. Now Jake and Molly are married. They have a teenage son. From experience, they know what he faces. But, with the legacy of Molly, they are determined to steer him through the storm.

Lord, when I am wrong, may I change, and when I right, let me be humble.

Ed Mathews

## **Mind Of Man**

Humans are prone to devise evil plans. After all, “*Who will notice?*” Thus, the psalmist concluded, “*the minds of men are cunning,*” Psalm 64:6.

The word “cunning” actually meant deep. It is used to describe a deep skin infection like leprosy. It refers to the malignant thoughts of man, Proverbs 18:4, the destructive actions of a prostitute, Proverbs 23:27.

1. Driven To God. Believers turn to the Lord. “*Protect my life,*” they beg—while the wicked conspire against the righteous, Psalm 64:1. There is more evil than the saints can handle. Try as they may, there is little they can do. Hence, they trust in God, Psalm 64:10. He will bring the wicked to ruin, Psalm 64:8a,b.

2. Slaves Of Satan. Sinners have surrendered to the devil. Their hearts grow callous. Their minds are overcome. There is no escape, no mercy. Sin breeds sin. Evil-doers encourage doing evil, Psalm 64:5a. The more they indulge in wickedness, the bolder they become. The thought of God troubles them. They try to dismiss Him. And, when He confronts them, they reject His grace.

In spite of what they say, the wicked are not at peace. Though they brag of being in control, they are not. And, when they boast of their success, their rejoicing is temporary. They will learn the hard way that God has the final say. All who see the end of evil “*will shake their heads in scorn,*” Psalm 64:8c.

The mind of men is cunning. But vengeance belongs to the Lord. He will repay. Thus, the saints wait patiently.

Our mind is a sacred vault that nothing can enter except with our permission.

Ed Mathews

## **Love Is**

Love sees what cannot be seen. It hears what cannot be heard. Love holds others in the highest esteem. It is the ultimate answer to our troubled world.

. SLOW TO EXPOSE. Love is "*kind*," I Corinthians 13:4b. It bears all things. It conceals what does not need to be revealed. "*It covers a multitude of sins*," I Peter 4:8. It keeps confidences. It knows when to speak and when to be silent. It refuses to harbor malice.

. READY TO DEFEND. Love believes all things (though it knows the difference between truth and error). And, in doubtful cases, it believes in innocence until there is proof of guilt. When love is the judge, it always stands with the accused. It believes people are better than rumor says.

. QUICK TO PROTECT. Love "*hopes*," I Corinthians 13:7c. Like a mother, it refuses to accept the faults of her children. It demands clear evidence. It defends. Why is love so hard to convince? It suspects no evil. It hopes for the best. When love enters, doubt leaves.

. WILLING TO RISK. Love "*perseveres*," I Corinthians 13:7d. It endures all things. It will see the most dubious actions in the best light. Love makes allowances. It waits for an explanation. It refuses to jump to conclusions. Love does not "*delight in evil*," I Corinthians 3:6a. It does not allow personal ambitions to effect ultimate decisions.

. FIRM TO THE END. Love "*never fails*," I Corinthians 13:8a. It graciously conceals when evidence is thin. It supports when witnesses accuse. Love stays when others leave. It waits. It refuses to give up. The greatest measure of love is love without measure.

Hate has enemies. Love has none.

Ed Mathews

## **Anguish**

Every generation has its outcasts. In the past, it was those with leprosy. In the present, it is the homeless. An outcast suffers a double agony: physical illness and social isolation.

Katherine Zell was different. She showed enormous compassion. A city official in Strasbourg, Germany was quarantined because he was a leper. Katherine, the wife of a prominent minister, visited the leper.

The most enduring aspect of her ministry was her letters of reassurance. She maintained a regular correspondence with the sick man.

Katherine lived in the early sixteenth century. The Bible was not readily available (especially to a leper). So her letters contained long passages of Scripture. Likely, those verses were the only “Bible” the man had. One of the passages she included was Psalm 130. The psalm is a cry of anguish—with which an outcast could identify.

In a letter, she explained why she quoted the psalm. *“My dear Felix. I have not been able to come as often as I would like—there are so many poor and sick here—but you are ever in my thoughts. We have often talked of how you are cut off from wife and family. I know this leaves you alone and desolate. Because I know your illness weights upon you daily, I have gathered some verses from the word of God that may make your yoke light in spirit (though not in flesh).”*

Katherine ended her letter with this quote: *“I wait for the Lord...and in His word I put my hope,”* Psalm 130:5.

Katherine made brief comments on the Scripture verses. Her expressions were not scholarly commentary, but practical encouragement to a downcast soul.

Ed Mathews

## **Self-Denial**

We often hear people appeal to the first amendment: the right to free speech. *"I can say what I want. This is a free country!"*

Really?

A man was entertaining some children. He would light a match, put it in his mouth, and extinguish it. The father of a young boy said, *"Don't do that!"* The man got angry. *"It is none of your business,"* he answered threateningly. *"I am not hurting myself."* *"But the children may hurt themselves,"* the father said. *"Look at my son."* The boy had a bandage on his lip. *"Yesterday he saw you do that trick. He tried it. He suffered a bad burn. You may not hurt yourself, but you can lead others to hurt themselves."*

People can be careless. They think of their rights and forget their influence. Should they not do to others what they wish others would do to them? Certainly *"love does no harm to its neighbor,"* Romans 13:10.

The question for everyone should be: What effect does the exercise of my liberty have on my fellowman? cf. I Corinthians 8:9. The disciple of Christ must *"deny himself,"* Luke 9:23. *"Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial,"* I Corinthians 10:23. Therefore, the Christian honors others above himself, Romans 12:10b.

To deny self is quite different from self-denial. We deny ourselves when we forego things that are harmful to us. We practice self-denial when we sacrifice things that are harmful to others.

We are not at liberty to say or do whatever we wish. Though the bill of rights guarantees our freedom, the will of God guides us in using it.

Ed Mathews

### **Innocent**

Clyde was an auto mechanic. Upon his retirement, he received a gold watch. He treasured that watch.

Clyde and his wife lived in a rough neighborhood. Their son wanted them to move. They declined. They wanted to stay and make a difference. They befriended the kids: gave them cookies and fixed their broken toys.

One night, around 10 PM, a friend called with car trouble. Clyde went to help. *"I will be back in an hour."* *"Pick up some milk on the way home."* *"Ok,"* he said.

Clyde did not return. During an apparent robbery-gone-bad, Clyde and his friend were gunned down. Both of them were died. It was such a senseless act!

The gold watch was missing. Rose, the wife of Clyde, grieved. For some reason, she wished she could have that watch. It meant so much to him.

Several weeks later a young man came to her door. He seemed nervous. She served cookies and milk. They chatted. Finally, the teenager pulled a gold watch out of his pocket. *"Here,"* he said, *"This is yours."* She melted into a puddle of tears. *"It is his watch,"* she said. *"How did you get it?"*

*"I was there. It was my companion who killed your husband. I hope you believe me?"* Rose thought for a moment. *"Well, a thief would not return a stolen item if he had killed the victim."*

How true! *"The conduct of the innocent is upright,"* Proverbs 21:8.

That gesture saved the young man from a long prison sentence. Rose testified on his behalf. He got ten years probation. They became best friends.

Indeed, Rose made a difference. Not the way she planned—but a huge difference nonetheless.

Ed Mathews



## **Last Gasp**

Hope strengthens the heart. But the wicked will be disappointed, Proverbs 10:28. *"Their hope will become a dying gasp,"* Job 11:20. They want to escape life but will merely transition to another one.

1. Despair. Like it or not, this life is followed by eternity. The hope of the wicked is *"fragile,"* Job 8:14,15. Calamity will come, Isaiah 13:9; Malachi 4:1; Ephesians 5:6; I Thessalonians 5:3. It is similar to the last gasp of a dying person.

2. Surprise. The unrighteous are not ready for the next world. They often deny the existence of eternity. They think they know but their words are a clever disguise. They cannot know until they put their trust in the Lord.

An alcoholic was dying. A minister was summoned to give comfort. The patient would have none of it. *"I am lost. I have no hope. I have ruined my life and the life of everyone around me."*

The dying person had a framed picture on his dresser. *"Who is this?"* the minister asked. *"My daughter!"* *"Would you forgive her if she was in trouble? Would you forgive her if she made a mistake?"*

*"Of course I would! Why do you ask?"* *"Because I want you to remember that God has your picture on His dresser."*

Hope helps humans face their final journey. Others have blazed the trail. No one has returned to tell about his experience. There are no maps. It is a one-way trip, a solo flight. There are no practices, no do-overs. Christians have hope because God has put out His welcome mat.

Forgiveness and hope go together like peanut and jelly.

Ed Mathews

## **Axioms**

When asked how he discovered the theory of relativity, Albert Einstein replied, “*I challenged the axiom.*” He had the courage to question accepted ideas.

An axiom is a self-evident (or universally recognized) principle. It is an established rule or understanding.

People like easy to grasp ideas—those that are simple, certain, and successful. Advertising uses them all the time. Take, for example, a hair restoration product. “*Anyone can apply it.*” “*It is from a root used by the Indians.*” And, “*a full head of hair will open doors.*”

Suppose we question those so-called facts. Does hair bring success? A lot of the most accomplished people in the world are bald. Plus, where did Ted Bundy’s hair get him? True, we do not associate baldness with Indians. But, since Indians have hair, does that mean we will have hair, too?

The people of ancient Israel believed that God would not allow the temple to be destroyed. They had accepted this idea as an axiom. No one questioned it. Therefore, when Jeremiah predicted it, the people refused to believe it.

Today, many travel the road of easy formulas. They believe one should present themselves to God as a person “*approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth,*” II Timothy 2:15. They may speak as the Bible speaks, but fail to speak in the spirit the Bible demands. They use a cut-and-dried approach without the courtesy, humility, and patience the Bible requires.

Let us examine our religious axioms. Are they true? Are they used with appropriate kindness? Do they apply to everyone, everywhere, at all times?

Ed Mathews

### **Price Of Freedom**

The Quakers were known for their boldness in demanding religious liberty. They were regularly ignored. So they came to the colonies in North America.

In many cases, they went from “the frying pan to the fire.” For most colonies showed no mercy toward religious minorities. This was particularly true in Boston. The Quakers were banished in order to clear the area of heresy. And, when that failed, the offenders were hung.

One of those who stood against this brutality was Mary Dyer. As a Quaker, she immigrated to Boston in 1659. She was brought to trial a few weeks after she arrived in the Bay Colony. She was sentenced to hang.

The execution was scheduled for the following week. The agony of the wait was terrible. On the fateful day, she was marched to the gallows. Drums were beaten to prevent her from saying anything to the crowd on the way to her doom. Her arms and legs were tied. Her eyes blindfolded. The rope was placed around her neck. One “could hear a pen drop!” Then, unexpectedly, she was released.

They authorities had no intention of hanging her. The awful ordeal was to intimidate, to force her to recant. She refused. So they sent her to Rhode Island. Less than a year later, Mary returned. She was determined to gain religious freedom for all people.

Once again she was arrested and sent to the gallows. Like before, she was offered a reprieve. She refused. “*The laws of God are above the laws of men,*” she said. And, with those words, she was hung.

*“I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out Your precepts,” Psalm 119:45.*

Ed Mathews

## **Almost**

Jeremiah issued a sobering thought. "*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved,*" Jeremiah 8:20. The prophet was describing the punishment of sin in terms of a failed harvest.

It is a tragedy when the time of reaping passes and the granary was still empty. Disaster was at the doorstep.

Equally tragic is a failure to use an opportunity to accept eternal salvation. The Bible repeatedly mentions those who were "almost" rescued.

. The wife of Lot was "almost saved." She was on her way out of Sodom. But she looked back. It was only a glance, a mere peek. Still she did not finish. She is remembered for "almost" but "not quite."

. The rich young ruler came so close but went away refusing to do the "one thing" that separated him from the kingdom. How sad!

. Judas was as close as one could get to the Savior. He traveled with the Lord for three years. He listened to His gracious words. Judas saw His kind deeds. He repeatedly heard His invitation. So close! Yet he betrayed the Lord.

. The thief on the cross (who did not repent) was close. Like the other robber, he could have been with Jesus in Paradise. But his "almost" became "never."

. King Agrippa, was "almost persuaded." Still he perished in his indecision. His "almost" became His "not enough."

How do you want to be remembered? Do not let the harvest pass! Do not let the summer end! Behold, now is the time of divine favor. Now is the day of salvation, cf. II Corinthians 6:2. What are you waiting for?

The present is the only time you have.

Ed Mathews

## **Forgiveness**

Jill sat on the floor looking at the shoebox. It contained her childhood memories: a basketball medal, a dried flower, a letter from her dad, etc. Jill had not opened the box for over a decade. Her most precious memory was a “forgiveness chart.”

While in Bible class, her brother made a chart with 490 squares. It represented the times he forgave her, cf. Matthew 18:21,22.

All the squares on the chart were filled. One represented the time she cheated in order to win a game of checkers. Another square was for bloodying his nose playing basketball. The last square—number 490—stood for the time she forgot to tell him about an essay he was supposed to write. Because she forgot, he got an “F.” Thus he got a “C” in the class—the only “C” during high school. That grade caused him to miss being valedictorian. It also resulted in him losing a full scholarship to a prestigious university.

Jill was heart broken. She loved her brother. He was the best brother any sister could have. And the chart proved it. He forgave her over and over (though she did not deserve it).

After high school, the siblings became strangers. On a wintery evening, while Jill was at work, her parents called to say her brother had been killed in an auto accident.

After the funeral, Jill retrieved the shoebox. She opened it expecting to find the “forgiveness chart.” It was gone! Instead, there was a letter. “*Dear Jill. I have made a new chart. Love, Bill.*” It had one square—number 491. In that square was the word: “Forgiven.”

Forgiveness is the perfume given to those who hurt us.

Ed Mathews

### **Depend On God**

Judah was out numbered and out maneuvered. Yet they won the battle because *"they relied on the Lord,"* II Chronicles 13:18.

The Hebrew word for "rely" means "to lean on someone or something," II Samuel 1:6; II Kings 5:18; 7:2,17. It refers to an attitude of trust, Ezekiel 29:6,7.

1. Relying On The Lord. Success does not depend on human cleverness but on human faithfulness. According to every calculation, the enemy should have won. But they lost. Judah did not forsake Jehovah, II Chronicles 13:10. This formula is repeated over and over in Scripture. Yet we are slow to recognize it. The path of righteousness is often unattractive and unpromising. Still it is the only path to victory.

3. Ignoring The Enemy. A few years later another king failed to rely on God, II Chronicles 16:7. He ignored the foe within his own country. He focused on his distant adversary. We do that, too. Millions are spent on hostilities abroad while rottenness at home is ignored. Likewise, the church pours huge resources into saving those on foreign soil while the sinner next door is left alone.

We must see the big picture.

God desires to bless His children. He wants us to lean on Him. He steps in when we are in danger, II Chronicles 14:11-13. He comes to our aid when we need Him most, Genesis 22:1.

Be certain! The Lord is more than an insurance policy. He is a Savior. Where faith is shallow, rescue is impossible. Pretending to be a servant of God, when we are a slave of satan, is hypocrisy, Job 8:11-13. God will have none of it.

Ed Mathews

## TEXT INDEX

Acts 1:8	2	I Peter 3:18	6
Acts 2:42	23	Philippians 2:14	25
		Philippians 4:8	10
II Chronicles 13:18	52	Philippians 4:11	20
Colossians 1:21,22	36	Proverbs 19:2b	33
I Corinthians 4:5	40	Proverbs 21:8	46
I Corinthians 13:1	1	Psalms 16:11	5
I Corinthians 13:4	43	Psalms 38:4	9
II Corinthians 5:17	34	Psalms 64:6	42
II Corinthians 6:2	50	Psalms 71:9	30
		Psalms 119:45	49
Daniel 6:27	31	Psalms 127:1a	8
		Psalms 150:5	44
Ephesians 1:6	26		
Ephesians 4:16	13	Romans 5:8	41
Ephesians 5:8	24	Romans 13:10	45
Exodus 14:14	27		
Exodus 36:4,5	22	I Samuel 29:4	37
Ezekiel 48:35b	12	II Samuel 3:39a	7
Genesis 1:1	14	II Timothy 1:12	35
Genesis 42:1	17	II Timothy 2:15	48
Isaiah 66:13	4		
Hebrews 10:27	39		
James 1:17	21		
James 1:21	28		
Jeremiah 29:11	16		
Job 11:20	47		
Job 13:16	29		
Joel 2:29	19		
II Kings 5:18	32		
Luke 6:38	15		
Luke 14:33	18		
Luke 15:32c	11		
Mark 14:8	38		
Matthew 6:1	3		
Matthew 18:21,22	51		

## TITLE INDEX

Almost	50	Price Of Freedom	49
Anguish	44		
A Plan	16	Quit Complaining	25
Attending Church	23		
Axioms	48	Reconciled	36
		Reward Of Kindness	40
Contentment	20		
		Saving Grace	41
Dare To Pray	29	Secret Service	3
Darkness To Light	24	Staring At Each Other	17
Dedicated	8	Suspicion	37
Delay	39		
Denying Self	45	Talking To Ourselves	10
Depending On God	52	The Lord Is There	12
Doing Our Best	19	The Mistake	9
		The Pearl	26
Forgiven	11	Touchstones	27
Forgiveness	51		
		Uncle "T"	28
Guidance	5		
		Voice Of An Angel	1
Haste	33		
He Is Mine	35	Weak	7
He Paid The Price	6	Who Am I?	31
		Witnesses	2
Innocent	46		
Last Gasp	47		
Law Of Life	13		
Mind Of Man	42		
More Than Enough	22		
My Daddy	21		
New	34		
On His Knees	14		
Others Did It	4		
Pardon Me	32		



