

CHURCH BULLETIN ARTICLES

Living Water

For

Thirsty Souls

by

Ed Mathews

Volume X

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 from the Sunday morning publication, the following bulletin articles are 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 gems of divine wisdom for the earthly journey. The following articles are living water for thirsty souls.

The articles are 280 words long (give or take a few words). Most people can read them in less than two minutes. 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

March 26, 2022

Split Personality

Do you have a split personality?

There are two ways of answering that question. It all depends on whether we think of a split personality as a mental illness or a spiritual disease. Let me clarify.

1. Mental Illness. A “split personality” (or what is labeled “schizophrenia”) is a very serious mental disorder. Fortunately, it is quite rare. The schizophrenic has multiple personalities—each set of individual traits acting separate from the other personalities. The condition requires professional help to affect a cure.

2. Spiritual Disease. Many people feel they have a split spiritual disorder because they possess a good and a bad side. We all have experienced times when we wished to do good but failed to accomplish it (or we did not want to do evil but did it anyway), cf. Romans 7:15. This is a common spiritual malady. *“For, the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,”* Galatians 5:17.

There are two ways to deal with a divided spiritual nature. Many folks strike a compromise so that they are never really good or seriously bad. Their existence is in an unsatisfactory state of spiritual limbo.

Other folks fully surrender to Christ. They find that His indwelling tips the scales in favor of the good. Though the bad does not disappear, its gradually diminishes in power.

Committed saints find this to be true. They live happier lives. Internal division gives way to spiritual unity. They no longer live. Christ lives in them, Galatians 2:20.

A partial spirituality is frustrating. But, when we put the Lord at the center, we will become a whole person—at peace with ourselves, others, and God.

Ed Mathews

Earth's Remotest Nations

One of our great missionary hymns was written as a poem for a sermon on foreign evangelism.

Reginald Heber was visiting his father-in-law who was scheduled to preach on missions the next day. The older man asked his son-in-law to write something appropriate for his sermon. Heber was a gifted poet. He agreed to supply some words.

*From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Africa's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.*

As Reginald penned those words, he had no idea that one day he himself would become a missionary in India (which is mentioned in the second line of his famous poem).

Heber served tirelessly for three years. The exhausting pace and the torrid heat took a heavy toll on his health. He died on April 3, 1829—four days before his forty-fourth birthday. He was buried in the village of Trichinopoly. A huge crowd of believers sang another song he had written: “*Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty!*”

The hymn “*From Greenland's Icy Mountains*” was almost lost. A preacher discovered it in a wastebasket at a blacksmith's shop. The poem, on a crumpled piece of paper, was copied and distributed to other ministers. One of those copies fell into the hands of a woman in the state of Georgia. She gave it to Lowell Mason—an American composer—who put the words to music.

The commitment to mission is summed up in verse three: “*Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim, till earth's remotest nations has learned Messiah's name*” cf. Isaiah 49:6.

Ed Mathews

Cold Water

In a discussion about “receiving rewards,” Jesus said, “*And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth he will certainly not lose his reward,*” Matthew 10:42. What does this verse mean?

The “little ones” are likely referring to the twelve apostles. The Lord was describing them as His children. The “cup of cold water” was a special act of kindness.

No doubt His words were suggesting a simple gesture of benevolence. Even the slightest act of goodwill toward His disciples would be rewarded.

In the first century, one could not go to the refrigerator to get a cup of cold water. Rather a person would have to go to a spring or a deep well. That was the only source of “cold” water. In the hot Middle Eastern climate, drinking water was usually warm.

The word of God is our water. If you want “cold” spiritual refreshment, you must go to the source. Many churchgoers are content to get it “piped through the preacher” (or through articles like the one you are reading). Christians should go to the source—the Scriptures.

There are those who tell me they read my words each day. How nice! But they fail to read the passages mentioned in the articles. They read the tepid words of a human author and neglect the fresh water of the Lord.

If you must choose one or the other, go to the source. Skip what I write and read the words of God. That is where the living water is found, where the abundant life resides.

Ed Mathews

Convinced

A pediatric nurse tried to allay the anxiety of her little patients. She would put her stethoscope in the ears of the children. Their eyes would light up with wonder.

One day she did her thing with four-year-old Jerry. *"Listen,"* she said. *"What do you suppose that noise is?"* Jerry remained silent for a few moments. Finally, his puzzled expression turned into a happy grin: *"That is Jesus knocking,"* he said.

* * * * *

Doubt sees obstacles, faith sees the way;
Doubt sees the night, faith sees the day;
Doubt dreads the next step, faith soars on high;
Doubt asks: *"Who believes?"* Faith answers: *"I."*

* * * * *

The saint grew old. Memory began to fade. Names slipped away. Family members became strangers. Even Bible verses evaporated.

A favorite passage was: *"I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day,"* II Timothy 1:12.

Slowly that verse became *"I am convinced."* Then it shrunk to just one word: *"convinced."* As the believer lay in the nursing home, the patient repeated the only word that remained: *"Convinced" . . . "convinced" . . . "convinced."* That was the only word that mattered.

Every thought was gone. Every idea disappeared. Every memory vanished. All that was left was the one, all-important idea: *"convinced!"*

What will be our final word? What will be our last thought? What will be the capstone expression of our life?

The saddest loss is what dies inside before we stop breathing. Likely, what is left reveals the true essence of our life.

Ed Mathews

How Long?

Pharaoh was stubborn. He admitted he was wrong, Exodus 9:27. But his admission was no more than idle words. Soon he repeated his mistake, Exodus 9:34. He showed humility in speech but lacked submission in action.

"How long would Pharaoh refuse to obey God?" Exodus 10:3. The patience of the Lord is wonderful. But it has a limit. He will hold His anger for a while. But humans must repent before it is too late.

1. When Opportunity Is Passed. Pharaoh remained stubborn. So Jehovah sent repeated plagues. The ruler begged for mercy, Exodus 10:16,17. Indeed, he was alarmed. He even confessed. He promised several times to do what was right, Exodus 8:8,28; 9:28. But, each time, he failed to keep his promise.

2. When Repentance Is Refused. God did all anyone could expect Him to do. But Pharaoh remained adamant, cf. Isaiah 5:4a. The Lord had waited for over a year. He did not ask too much. As soon as a plague was lifted, Pharaoh *"sinned again."* Instead of being better, he got worse.

3. When Time Runs Out. God did not back down. Pharaoh should have. Jehovah demonstrated His *"power,"* Exodus 9:16. The Egyptian ruler showed his stupidity. The die was cast. The heart of Pharaoh became hard. Time expired. Repentance was taken "off the table." The patience of God became the judgment of God.

When will humans learn? How long will they resist God? Should the creature arm-wrestle with the Creator? Notwithstanding, people on every continent are fighting God!

Are we? How long will we resist the Almighty? How long will we struggle? *"Unless we repent we will perish," Luke 13:3.*

Ed Mathews

Songs Of Joy

Missionaries rescue the lost. And, later, reclaim saints that have fallen from the faith. Of the two ministries, the latter can be the most difficult. Nevertheless, *“those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy,” Psalm 126:5.*

Noriko Suzuki, a young Japanese woman, worked among the Eskimos in northern Canada. In 1977, she was assigned to re-convert those who had turned away from the Lord. Suzuki soon became discouraged. Would the local Eskimos turn again? Would they receive what they had thrown away? Her efforts had been fruitless.

Eko was married. He had three children. But he had abandoned his family. He was once a pillar in the village congregation. Alcohol destroyed his life. He drifted away from his hometown. He met Noriko Suzuki three hundred miles away in another village.

Eko was planning to divorce his wife. Noriko begged him to reconcile. Eko did not seem to care. The Japanese missionary ministered in tears. It seemed hopeless. She gave Eko a newly translated Eskimo Bible. *“Read this,”* she said. *“I will pray for you everyday.”*

Six years later, Noriko received a letter from Eko. It was her “song of joy.” *“Thank you for being a true friend to me,”* the letter began. *“God has chosen people like you to help people like me.”*

Eko had stopped drinking. He had renewed his faith. And he was reunited with his family. Noriko wrote to her supporters back in Japan. *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up,” Galatians 6:9.*

Indeed, those who sow in tears will reap “songs of joy.”

Ed Mathews

Self-Examination

Sunday worship had just concluded. Two churchgoers were discussing the morning service. One of them—who tended to be critical—began condemning those who took the communion.

“Many failed to examine themselves,” the critical man said. *“Why do you think so?”* the second man asked. *“Well,”* the first man replied, *“most of them were sinners—not worthy of the body and blood of the Lord,”* 1 Corinthians 11:28.

“Did you take the emblems?” the second man inquired. *“Yes, of course!”* *“Mmmmm! I do not know about the others, but I feel certain that you should not have done so!”* *“Really,”* the first man responded with surprise. *“Why not?”* *“You did not examine yourself! You failed to see your own judgmental attitude. You condemned others but approved yourself.”*

The Lord is always eager to welcome the humble. *“The high and lofty One...is with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,”* Isaiah 57:15. Indeed, God said, *“This is the one I esteem; he who is humble and contrite in spirit,”* Isaiah 66:2. *“The Lord resists the proud but gives grace to the humble,”* 1 Peter 5:5.

It is easy to be judgmental. It is better to examine yourself. We are only responsible for ourselves. We will only give an account of what we have thought and done.

The lady complemented the preacher as she left the church. *“Your sermon was wonderful today. It applied to everybody I know!”*

*“Have Your own way, Lord!
Search me and try me, Master today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.*

He who has a high opinion of himself is invariably a poor judge of others.

Ed Mathews

Dad Said

Ninety people braved the cold to hunt for Butch. The eight year old was lost in the woods. It was the middle of winter—ten below zero.

As night came, the family became concerned. By morning the search party still had not found him. Finally, the rescue team located boot prints that were small enough to be his. Everyone was hopeful. The morning passed. Still no boy! At three o'clock in the afternoon they found him. He seemed fine.

The rescuers rushed Butch to the hospital. The doctors could not believe it. *"He is in super shape!"* they said. Actually he was in better condition than the search and rescue party.

Why did Butch do so well? His dad had taught him how to survive in the woods. Butch did exactly what his father said.

He gathered pine boughs and piled them on the ground under a spruce tree. Then, he gathered more pine boughs for a "blanket." Butch told the emergency room personnel: *"I was as snug as a bug in a rug!"* Why? He did what his dad said.

What an example! We should do what our heavenly Father tells us. We must not follow the instructions of the world or obey the inclinations of our hearts. We must listen to the Lord. He knows best. Then, we, too, will end up in *"super shape."*

Therefore, *"trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight,"* Proverbs 3:5,6; cf. Deuteronomy 14:1a.

Faith is worthless unless it is applied.

Ed Mathews

No More

Judah was in trouble. Assyria was on her border. So Judah made an alliance with Egypt, Isaiah 30:1,2. However, relying on Egypt was useless, Isaiah 30:4,5.

Judah was tired of listening to God. *"Give us no more visions of what is right!"* they said. The people were done with hearing about divine truth. Judah preferred *"pleasant illusions,"* Isaiah 30:10. *"Stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel,"* they begged, Isaiah 30:11.

1. Description Of The Problem. Humans usually like truth—whether historical or scientific truth. But, we tend to shun moral truth. We like to have our behavior praised, our character admired, our conduct appreciated. We detest correction, resist instruction, and avoid condemnation. Pleasantries are more fun.

2. Reason For The Problem. Moral truth is vexing. It disturbs our routine. We are aware of our moral shortcomings. We do not wish to hear about our imperfections. Thus, we oppose personal advice. Flattery tickles our ears. Happy lies soothe our conscience. Moral warnings upset. We prefer illusions.

3. Outcome Of The Problem. In order to be prepared for the Day of Judgment, we need the stern rebuke of moral truth. Otherwise, we will think we are better than we really are. We will grow satisfied. We will believe we are ready to meet our Maker though we may be *"wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,"* Revelation 3:17.

This is not the time for pretending, make believe, and false impressions. We must be genuine from the inside out. Then the Lord will say, *"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight,"* Isaiah 42:3.

The truth should not hurt unless it needs to.

Ed Mathews

Fishers Of Men

William McCarrell moved to Cicero, Illinois in 1913. He served a congregation of thirty-five people. His salary was five dollars a week. It was not a grand beginning.

Cicero was a gang-infested city. McCarrell was undaunted. He immediately began to win souls by strong sermons and personal evangelism. The church soon became a "beacon in the night."

Under the leadership of McCarrell, the congregation planted a dozen other congregations. It sent over thirty missionaries overseas. It pioneered radio evangelism. The congregation also operated a successful religious bookstore. And, above all, it was the home of the Fishermen's Club.

The club began in 1923. A decade later it had converted over three thousand souls. Membership in the club required five things:

- . Sound faith
- . Faithful living
- . Passion for souls
- . Personal evangelism
- . Unconditional love

Every week club members met. Each member was expected to report on his or her evangelistic activity. When McCarrell asked for the reports, the room erupted with answers: "*18 invited to church,*" "*7 Bible studies conducted,*" "*62 tracts distributed,*" "*5 baptisms,*" "*2 renewals of faith.*" The air was filled with excitement. The feeling was contagious. When they were told they should not, they did. When told they could not, they did anyway.

McCarrell was a five-foot-four-inch, one hundred sixty pound, energetic Irishman known as the "Big Fisherman." He was a tireless spokesman for Jesus. He never met a stranger.

Christ said, "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will catch men,*" Luke 5:10b. Indeed, He told us to "*follow Him and He would make us fishers of men,*" Matthew 4:19.

The question is: How can we keep following without fishing?

Ed Mathews

Soon And Very Soon

We have heard the warning. We realize it is true. Jesus will be coming soon. *"For in just a very little while He who is coming will come and will not delay," Hebrews 10:37.*

His return gives us hope. For, it reminds us, when life is hard, life is short. The second coming strengthens our resolve. Just another tear and He will appear.

A minister mentioned the eminent return of Jesus. *"But how do you know He will come soon?"* a man asked. *"Well,"* the preacher said thoughtfully, *"it is like listening to Handel's Messiah. When the performance has been going on for over two hours, you know it is near the end. The choir is singing the last chorus."*

And, likewise, the Bible tells us *"it is almost over!"* Though we do not know the day or the hour, without a doubt the end is just around the corner. As James said, *"The Lord's coming is near," James 5:8.*

A beekeeper needed to add a hive box. He decided to do it tomorrow. And, as he was nailing the frames and inserting the sheets of wax, he heard the swarm fly away to points unknown. Frustrated, the apiarist muttered, *"almost but lost."*

It is sad to lose a swarm of bees. But it is trivial compared to losing our soul. After discussing the return of Christ, Paul told the congregation in Thessalonica to *"encourage one another with these words," I Thessalonians 4:18*. That is the purpose of this article.

The rich study the stock market. The rancher watches his cattle. The nurse checks her patients. But the Christian looks toward the clouds.

Ed Mathews

Under Repair

Many people believe “*church goers consider themselves superior to non-church goers.*” Really? If so, it is time to clear the air, to examine such claims closely.

1. It Is Silly. It is foolish to say that church people think they are better than others. Those who go to church are “under repair.” They have come to realize that they need fixing. They know they cannot mend themselves. They invite others to attend church like a thirsty traveler showing other thirsty travelers where the water is. They need it, too.

2. It Is False. It is nonsense to say church attenders think they are better than people who stay at home. For, it is their feeling of weakness that leads them to seek the Lord in the first place. It is because they receive much needed help that they return week after week. It may look like a “holier-than-thou-attitude” but it is really not.

God offers a helping hand. He does not want anyone to perish. Neither does the church member. He is no better than others (though he has been forgiven of his sin). A churchgoer is merely redeemed. The difference between a saint and a sinner is not that one is better than the other but one is closer to God than the other.

It is premature to decide what heaven can do with those “under repair.” However, it is certain that—if God has His way—they will not look down on their fellow travelers, cf. Matthew 7:1,2. The ground is level at the foot of the cross!

Make sure your opinion of others is better than what they think of you.

Ed Mathews

Next Page

We have a Bible. We take it for granted that others do, too. But, in countries where repressive governments rule, there is *“a famine of hearing the words of the Lord,”* Amos 8:11,12.

Robert Evans was visiting Poland shortly after the Second World War. He had gone there having no idea if anyone would be interested. He was surprised by the reception. Thousands came to listen. Robert preached for hours. It was apparent that most of them had never heard the Gospel. No one carried a Bible (though many asked for one). They were hungry—famished for lack of spiritual food.

Robert had spoken for six and a half hours straight. He was exhausted. His interpreter was, too. They walked off the stage amidst shouts of *“more—please tell us more!”*

As they left the building, an old man confronted them. He carefully pulled from his pocket a worn piece of paper. *“Is this a page from the Bible?”* he asked. The man lovingly unfolded the fragile sheet of paper. It was yellow with age, heavily creased, and torn in several places. And, again, he asked, *“Is this part of the Bible?”* It was a page from the Book of Exodus.

The old man was excited. He had read that page every day for thirty years. Robert thought the man would inquire about what it meant. But, instead, he asked, *“What does the next page say?”* Robert let him hold his Bible. It was the first time the man had held the entire word of God. He cried.

A tattered page of Scripture that is read is worth more than a dozen unexamined Bibles.

Ed Mathews

Whiter Than Snow

Blood and water purified a leper. That is similar to our cleaning from sin—through the “*blood of Christ*,” Ephesians 1:7, and the “*washing of water*,” Ephesians 5:26.

Our salvation depends on blood and water. The two are mentioned over and over. Both are essential. Neither must be omitted. The blood and water washes us clean, Hebrews 9:13,14; 10:22; 1 Peter 3:2.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, he admitted his horrible crime. He poured out his heart in repentance “*Cleanse me with hyssop (which was dipped in blood) “and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow,*” he wrote, Psalms 51:7. Again, blood and water were involved.

We see freshly fallen snow as pure. What could be whiter? Yet, every snowflake has at its core a tiny speck of dirt around which the ice is formed. In other words, every snowflake has a dirty heart! But, the blood and the water purify us “*whiter than snow!*”

When King Edward VII was the Prince of Wales, he visited a country nobleman. The daughter of the nobleman approached the prince. She asked to sit by him! He obliged. She proceeded to talk to the prince about his soul. “*Are you saved?*” she inquired. The prince was caught completely off guard. “*Well,*” he said, “*I am not sure.*”

The little girl probed further. “*Sir,*” she said, “*Do you know what is whiter than snow?*” “*Can’t say that I do,*” he answered. “*Well,*” she replied, “*every soul washed in the blood of Jesus and in the water of baptism, is purer than the purest snow!*”

We whitewash sin. Jesus washes our sin white.

Ed Mathews

Home

John had become an orphan. What was he going to do? Where was he going to go? Without a family, without a home, the world was a scary place.

An aunt agreed to take him in. She sent her husband to fetch the young lad. John was only six. The uncle talked to John on the way to his new address. The uncle reassured the boy that all would be well.

"Will my aunt love me?" John asked. "Yes," the uncle said. "Will I like her?" "Absolutely! She is a wonderful person!" "Will I have my own room? Will I have my own toys?" John inquired. "Don't you worry, son, everything is ready for our arrival. Your aunt is expecting you." And, when they approached the house, the porch light was on. Aunt Tillie was smiling.

The warmth of her embrace removed all doubt. John was home. He grew up smothered in love. He never forgot her kindness. And, when she grew old, he put on the porch light and welcomed her to his house.

"Years ago," he said, "when I had no where to go, you gave me a place to live. Now, it is my turn to love you like you loved me. I will take care of you for the rest of your days. This is where you belong." His embrace removed all doubt from her anxious heart. Tillie was home.

Is this not similar to our future dwelling? Jesus has prepared a place for us. The porch light is on. *"And," He said, "I will take you to be with Me, so that you may be where I am,"* John 14:3.

Ed Mathews

The Past

It is tragic when our past comes to live in our present. The unpleasant things that were safely out of sight suddenly resurface to haunt our here and now. What was supposed to be out of the way gets in the way. Our world is turned upside down.

It is almost impossible to keep our past in the past. The chance is slim-to-none in the media connected world in which we live. It is folly to think a skeleton in our closet will remain there.

It would be wonderful to wish away all the embarrassing mistakes of yesterday. It would be awesome to have a clean slate again. But most people are not overly concerned about past sins or future judgment. It used to be a matter of forgiving. Now it is an exercise in forgetting. The world believes the happiest person is the one with the worst memory.

But is forgetting enough? Would it not be better to be forgiven?

The one who thinks everything is under control lives in a fool's paradise. The next knock on the door, the next phone call can expose the secret. Then what? And, should the lid stay on until death, what about the Judgment? Only God can fix our fixes.

Now is the time to right our wrongs, to straighten what is crooked. *"As far as the east is from the west, so far will He remove our transgressions from us, Psalm 103:12.* The Lord promised to remember our sins no more, *Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34b; cf. Jeremiah 50:20.* Hallelujah! That is the way to deal with the past!

Forgiveness is the place of beginning again.

Ed Mathews

Could Not Hold It In

Shortly after World War II, Bob Harris went to France as a missionary. He spoke to everyone he met. Almost no one listened. People were not interested. They had their hands full with rebuilding a war torn nation.

Bob became discouraged. *"Why bother?"* he thought. On a rare whim, we went to the French Riviera for a short vacation. He learned to his surprise that everyone who worked at the hotel was a Christian. How could that be?

The French people had almost no knowledge of the Gospel. Only a small percent went to church. And, the vast majority, were nominal believers at best. Surely none of them told the hotel staff about Christ.

The faith among the hotel workers intrigued Bob. He was interested to know how an oasis of faith could exist in a desert of ignorance. The chance of all those employees hearing the Good News from a fellow Frenchman was incredibly small.

Harris pursued the mystery. In time, he narrowed his search to a happy painter. The painter explained. *"Everything in this hotel is painted every year. I get to be with everyone in this building every twelve months."*

For the painter, it was a matter of being friendly. He was truly a messenger of heaven. *"I cannot hold it in,"* he said. And, sure enough, he told everyone he met how God rescues sinners.

That painter was a modern day Jeremiah. *"To whom can I speak...? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed. The word of the Lord is offensive to them. They find no pleasure in it. But I cannot hold it in,"* Jeremiah 6:10,11.

Ed Mathews

Left Overs

Have you ever wondered what was done with the twelve baskets of fragments left over after feeding the five thousand? Were they put in the dumpster? Were they fed to the birds? We do not know.

It seems certain that nothing was wasted. Jesus told His disciples to “*gather the pieces that remain so that nothing is lost,*” [John 6:12](#). It was as if He saying, “*The people have eaten. Remember those who are still hungry.*”

There are several lessons here.

1. We are not to waste the meal or the scraps. Both are important to the Lord. We do not throw away the apple. Why discard the peeling? We do not get rid of the bread. Why discard the crumbs?
2. When we have eaten the Bread of Life, we should share with those who have not eaten. It is not enough to read the word. We should feed the word to others.
3. We are responsible to make sure nothing is lost. Our daily bread is precious. Our eternal food has value beyond price. Neither must be wasted. Nothing must be tossed aside.

Our tendency is to have less respect for what is cheap—while expensive things are carefully preserved. But the Lord seemed to say, “*Waste not, want not!*”

To the disciples, the instructions were not new or strange. For, at Jewish feasts, in the first century, the custom was to leave something for the servants. The fragments were called “peah.” Likely, those who enjoyed the picnic that day left “peah.” It was their way of thanking the disciples for serving them the food.

I feed myself. Am I sharing with others?

Ed Mathews

Hardest Part

A man was interviewed after winning the Boston Marathon. *“What was the hardest part: The first five miles, the middle five miles, or the last five miles?”* Without hesitation, he answered, *“the middle five miles!”*

“Why is that so?” the reporter inquired. *“The first five were easier because I was fresh. The last five miles I had the goal in sight. It is the middle five where most runners give up!”*

Is that not true of our spiritual life? When we begin our walk with God, we are excited. We are happy in our newfound faith. We take every opportunity to study the word. We find great pleasure in meeting with the saints.

And, when we are closer to the “finish line,” we use every ounce of our remaining strength to complete the race. We have come a long way. We lunge toward the finish. Heaven is in sight. Eternity is within our grasp.

Clearly, it is those “in between” years that require a firm determination. The responsibilities are heavy. The distractions are numerous. The crown seems a long way off. Hence, we may neglect daily prayer. And mid-week Bible Study is often skipped. Our spiritual growth stalls.

It is sad. When we could do the most for the kingdom we often do the least. When we could be the most involved we are the least involved.

Did the “middle of the race” do you in? Did the halfway mark cripple your enthusiasm? It happens. But that is not acceptable. God wants finishers. Quitters do not receive the trophy.

Thus, *“run in such a way as to get the prize,”* I Corinthians 9:24; cf. Philippians 3:14.

Ed Mathews

He Knows Best

Sometimes there are painful setbacks in church work. Converts abandon the faith. Congregations suffer division. Progress is brought to a halt.

Why does God allow such things? We do not know. He moves in mysterious ways. We are asked to believe—not to explain.

This was true for Frank and Marie Drown. They served in the Amazon jungle of eastern Ecuador. Tribal conflict was common. The Drowns had learned the language. They had shared the Good News. But the bloodshed persisted.

One of their converts was Tsanti. He was the tribal chief—a former warrior. He had one hundred skulls in his house to prove it. Yet God had changed him. He was a fearless lover of his fellowman.

Frank and Tsanti went to another tribe to share the Gospel. The great chief begged for their forgiveness. They invited him to stay in their lodge. Their forgiveness was a sham. While asleep, Tanti was murdered. Intertribal war ensued. When the dust settled, over thirty warriors lay dead.

The tragedy almost destroyed fifteen years of hard work. Frank and Marie were heartbroken. What was God telling them? Travel was dangerous. So they started a radio ministry.

Eight years later, Frank ventured back into the jungle. While on the path, warriors met him. They were the same men that killed Tsanti. They escorted him to the lodge—where the chief had been killed. A radio was broadcasting a sermon Frank had recorded. After three days of intense Bible study, two hundred and ten people were baptized!

We can be confident that God *“who began a good work . . . will carry it to completion,”* Philippians 1:6.

Ed Mathews

Know Yourself

Some people are so busy congratulating themselves they have no time for examining themselves. But, if they took a few moments to look inside, they would find out the real truth.

God searches our hearts and examines our minds, Jeremiah 17:10; 20:12a. He knows what is going on in the “secret” chambers of our thoughts and feelings. He is aware of the good and the bad in everyone, Proverbs 5:21. That includes you and me.

We are urged to examine ourselves, to learn the facts, to know the truth. Jeremiah advised it, Lamentations 3:40. Most people will dismiss it (because they think they already know). But, in reality, *“the man who thinks he knows...does not yet know as he ought to know,”* I Corinthians 8:2.

Self-examination is a serious matter. Consider the pompous Bible Class teacher. He spoke in his best “preacher tone” about the importance of living the Christians life. *“Why do people call me a Christian?”* he asked. After a few moments of silence, a student answered, *“Maybe they do not know you!”*

Save me from myself,
From the folly You see!

If we would put ourselves under a microscope, we might come to the humbling realization that we are not what we think we are. And, we can be certain: *“It would not turn out well if God examined us,”* Job 13:9. The Lord sees everything. He overlooks nothing. We are totally exposed before the eyes of Him who sees all. He judges the intentions and decisions of our minds, Hebrews 4:13. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Those who brag about knowing themselves usually have much to learn.

Ed Mathews

Who Cares?

Paul was defeated. Where? It was not at Lystra where he was stoned? It was not in Thessalonica where an angry mob drove him out of town. It was not at Philippi where he was beaten and imprisoned. It was not in Corinth or Ephesus where he was persecuted. No! For, in each of these places, he planted a church. Paul was defeated at Athens—where no violence was shown. Where hardly anyone cared!

1. Sinners must be awakened to their situation. Most do not think they are headed to hell. Many do not think there is such a place. A lot of them have never considered the thought one way or another. People are indifferent. They are content the way they are. Change is ignored. The truth falls on deaf ears, cf. Jeremiah 12:11.

2. Saints can defeat the Gospel, too. It is not necessary to use violence, to say discouraging words, to put locks on the church doors. Members can simply be indifferent. The defeat of the church will surely follow. Mental attitude plays a far more important part in the failure of a congregation than mental capacity.

Indifference is deadly. A church is doomed when no one cares. Members may come. They may give. But they do not pray for the success of the congregation. They do not pitch in and help. They do not take responsibility for anything. They simply do not care. It does not cross their mind to take part. Such an attitude will defeat any effort. It will destroy any plan. It will stymie any initiative.

The height of success is determined by the depth of care in achieving it.

Ed Mathews

Value Of The Old Testament

There are opposing views about the Old Testament. (1) Some people say that it should be followed today. (2) Others assume the Old Testament has no practical value in our contemporary world.

Jesus kept the law. It guided the Israelites to Christ, Galatians 3:25. Then He took the law away, Colossians 2:14. He gave us a better covenant, Hebrews 8:6. But, the Old Testament still has value.

1. A Great Historical Record. The Old Testament is an accurate record of human history from the beginning down to 400 BC. It records the rise and fall of mighty empires. It reveals the nature of man. It shows the need for divine help to overcome human weakness.
2. An Important Study Guide. The Old Testament exposes our selfishness and sin. It shows us how people treat God and one another. It reveals our good and bad side. It sounds the warning and points us to God, Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11.
3. A Treasure Of Divine Wisdom. The Old Testament records the faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the courage of Daniel, and the tears of Jeremiah (plus much, much more). It is an invaluable source of spiritual help, II Timothy 3:16.
4. A Confirmation Of Christ's Deity. The Old Covenant supplies abundant evidence for the deity of Jesus. He is the Messiah. The proof lies in the ancient Scriptures. It records over 300 messianic prophecies, cf. John 5:39. Jesus fulfilled them all.

The New Testament without the Old Testament is a book without an introduction, a text without a context. The Old Testament begins the story. The New Testament completes it.

Ed Mathews

Friends

A friend is someone you know, you like, and you trust. A friend is a comrade, a buddy, and a colleague. *"A friend loves at all times," Proverbs 17:17.*

- . The only way to have a friend is to be one.
- . A true friend likes you the way you are.
- . A friend respects your space but is never far away.
- . Enemies come with a price—friends are free.
- . Friendship multiplies happiness because it subtracts grief.
- . Friends cannot be bought.
- . Friends are like money—valued most when lost.
- . Acceptance of self allows friendship with others.
- . If you are looking for a flawless friend, you will be lonesome.
- . In prosperity, our friends know us. In adversity, we know our friends.
- . Correct a friend privately—commend him publicly.

Jesus said, *"You are My friends if you do what I command," John 15:14*. That is the one friendship we want to keep at all costs.

Ed Mathews

Willing

The prisoners were herded into a room. The gathering meant another lecture on being good. The inmates were not interested. But this assembly was different.

A short, heavy-set, woman came from a side entrance. The men had not seen a woman in months. What was she doing there? How did she get permission?

She climbed the podium. Her thick German accent made it difficult to understand her words. But she immediately captured their attention. She spoke of Jews, Nazis, and gas chambers. And, then, she mentioned the betrayal. This woman spoke their language!

The woman was Corrie ten Boom. They respectfully listened. There was more to her story. After World War II, Corrie learned the name of her betrayer. He was a fellow Dutchman, a neighbor, and family friend. His treason had caused the death of her father, brother, sister, and nephew. She had ample reason to hate him.

Corrie forgave the traitor. She wrote him a letter. She spoke of her compassion for him. *"I love you because God loves me. If He can pardon me, I can pardon you!"* The betrayer wrote back. *"There is hope for me. If the Lord can melt your heart, He can melt mine. Thank you for your kindness."*

Corrie went on to challenge the prisoners to let the Lord into their hearts. *"Like the thief on the cross, Jesus welcomes you,"* she said, cf. Luke 23:39-43.

What about us? We may not be prisoners but we still need the Savior. He has not withdrawn His offer. *"Who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?"* I Chronicles 29:5b.

No one is ever better than he wants to be.

Ed Mathews

Courtesy

Courtesy is a sign of kindness. The dictionary says courtesy is “*polite behavior, gracious manners.*” On their way to Rome, the centurion was “*kind*” to Paul. He allowed his prisoner to visit his friends, Acts 27:3.

Every Christian should be courteous. It is a frame of mind—not just an outward act of gentility. At its core, courtesy is regard for others. The coming of Christ was called the “*kindness of God*,” Titus 3:4.

I was late. I had to park my car three blocks away. The church parking lot could have held twenty more cars if everyone had put their vehicles within the lines. Courtesy was in short supply. The church members left their cars any old way—parallel with, at right angles to, or straddling the parking lot strips. No one seemed to care. If I had not been the guest speaker, I would have moved on.

Why do we display good manners in some situations and abandon courtesy at other times? Why do we impatiently honk our horn one moment and let a stranded motorist “cut in line” the next? Kindness is appropriate everywhere, with everyone, all the time.

The family cat came into the room with his usual request written on its cute face. He needed someone to scratch his chin. Our daughter would say, “*Kitty needs to be purred.*”

The cat was not the only one who needed to be purred. My wife did, too. And so did my kids and my fellow Christians. Everybody, everywhere needs to purr everyday! There are no unimportant people or unimportant acts of kindness.

The oil of courtesy will eliminate the fraction of life.

Ed Mathews

Strategies Of God

The Lord pursued Israel. He wanted her to come back. But she would not. He sent famine, drought, blight, pestilence, and earthquake. Yet she “*did not return to Him,*” Amos 4:6-11. The prophet recorded the vain efforts of God toward an incorrigible nation.

1. God Tried. The Lord sounded the alarm. Israel covered her ears. Jehovah offered help. Israel pushed it away. So God changed His tactics. The gesture was worth making but the results were the same. Though the effect was close to the cause, Israel did not make the connection.

2. Israel Failed. The afflicted refused to see suffering as punishment. They attributed their calamities to bad management, to climatic causes, or to natural disasters. Suffering by itself does not purify. Unless it is seen in the context of sin, it simply embitters. Israel preferred to “*curse God and die!*”

3. Heaven Threatened. “*Therefore, this is what I will do to you,*” God said, Amos 4:12a. The sovereign Lord was not finished. Though His initial strategies had yielded no results, He continued. The Lord wanted to redeem His people. His people did not seem interested.

4. Israel Warned. “*Prepare to meet your God,*” Amos 4:12b. Like it or not, Israel would confront her Maker. It was inevitable. It would be soon. Preparation was possible. Hope remained. Redemption was still available. Until judgment came mercy stayed.

Their story is our story. God has His strategies. He still wants to save. Time is short. He is waiting. Will the prodigal come home? Will the sinner see the light?

We can do what we should do if we want to do it bad enough.

Ed Mathews

A Dead Church

An elder visited a church member. It was a social visit but the conversation turned to the church. *"It seems to me,"* the church member said, *"the congregation is always needing something."* *"Yes!"* the elder agreed, *"She needs something because she is always doing something."*

"The church is like raising my boy," the elder added. *"The lad was always needy: a new pair of shoes, lunch money, a birthday party gift, etc. But he died. He needs nothing now. I would give anything to hear him ask for something, again. But that will never happen. I realize now—after it is too late—how much happiness I found in filling his needs!"*

"Likewise, you would miss the church," the elder continued. *"It has always been there. You have taken her for granted. But how would you feel if the church died? Frankly, I confess, I would be lost without the Body of Christ."*

"As long as the church lives, she will have needs. When she quits having needs, she has died. A dead church cannot offer a living hope. A congregation that has no needs—fills none. In other words, a living church is a needy church."

"I have never thought of it that way," the member admitted. *"It is true,"* the elder said, *"the church is not defeated by persecution but by indifference. And, when a congregation dies, a beacon of light goes out, a place of belonging is gone."*

There is a blessing in being needed. Parents know it. Church members feel it, Galatians 6:10. We are happiest when we supply the needs of others.

The church must not be viewed as a burden.

Ed Mathews

Beauty

Paul Brand was a world famous hand surgeon. He wrote the book: *Fearfully And Wonderfully Made.* Paul attributed his success to his mother.

The rugged conditions in rural India left her frail and bent. Her repeated bouts with typhoid, dysentery, and malaria made her thin and wrinkled. For that reason, she adamantly refused to keep a mirror in her home.

Granny would often say, “*Beauty is fleeting,*” Proverbs 31:30. And, “*like a field of ripened grain, it soon vanishes,*” Psalms 37:20. Granny knew that all too well. Back in the day, she was a head-turner.

Granny Brand was a physician. When she was seventy-five, she broke her hip. She was carried on a stretcher down the mountain and across the valley to a clinic. When her son, Paul, visited her, she was walking with two bamboo canes.

Paul had come to convince her to retire. “*It is not safe for you to remain on the mission field.*” Granny refused to leave. “*What is the use of preserving this old body,*” she said. “*The people need me. And God does, too.*” She stayed in India.

Eighteen years later—at the age of ninety-three—she gave up walking to the remote villages. Instead, she was carried in a hammock. For two more years, she served “*her people.*”

Finally, at the age of ninety-five, she died. Though paralyzed from the waist down, she continued to serve till the end. To her supporters in America, she was a medical hazard. To the people in India, she was a beautiful angel.

The unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit is of great worth in the sight of God
I Peter 3:4.

Ed Mathews

Eat Like Pigs

Nature praises God, Psalm 148:7-12. The hills clap. The streams rejoice. The heavens and earth declare His glory. But, in all of creation, we—the most mentally capable—praise Him the least. Why is that? I can think of many reasons. Two seem particularly relevant.

1. We Have Too Much. When our barns are full, we forget who filled them. We act like we are independent, self-sufficient. We do not need God. We think we are the center of the universe.

2. We Think Too Little. Our thoughts are focused on ourselves. Our possessions become the boundaries of our concern. The Lord is excluded. When we pay so much attention to our estate, we forget the kingdom of God.

A farmer dined with a group of sophisticated city folks. When the meal was served, the farmer gave thanks. *“That is old fashioned,”* the urban guests said. *“Educated people know better.”* *“Well, some of those on my farm think like you do.”* *“And who are they?”* *“The pigs”* he replied!

A prominent rich man had lunch with a poor man. The rich man began eating. The poor man prayed. *“Why do you pray?”* the rich man asked. *“I do not want to be like the hogs. They eat the acorns like they grow on the ground. But I know where my food comes from.”*

Appreciation precedes gratitude. The thankful praise God. It is good to hem our blessings with praise lest they unravel. We must not bite the hand that feeds us.

Heaven condemns ingratitude. Sinners know there is a God, but *“they neither glorify Him as God nor give thanks,”* Romans 1:21. Do we do that, too?

Ed Mathews

Accepted

Against prudent advice, David counted his troops, II Samuel 24:1-4. After the census, David was remorseful: *"I have done a very foolish thing,"* II Samuel 24:10. A deadly plague ensued. Seventy thousand people died, II Samuel 24:15.

A similar judgment is coming. Only a few take heed. Most remain unconcerned. The pleasures and cares of life consume them, Luke 21:34. What did David do?

1. He Built An Altar, I Chronicles 21:26a. He met with the Lord. God answered his request for relief from the slaughtering plague. The altar was built on the very spot where the temple was later constructed, I Chronicles 22:1. That holy edifice became *"a shadow of things that were to come,"* Colossians 2:17. The reality has now arrived.

2. He Gave An Offering, I Chronicles 21:26b. The altar was to be used. It invited worship. David offered a sacrifice. He came face to face with God. And, in Christ, we do, too, I Peter 2:5. There we dedicate (or rededicate) ourselves to Him. With such sacrifices, God is well pleased. We are sinners but He accepts us.

3. He Received An Acceptance, I Chronicles 21:26c. The man from whom David bought the land (to build the altar) hoped God would *"accept"* the king, II Samuel 24:23. The Lord did, I Chronicles 21:28. Likewise, the Father accepts the sacrifice of Christ. When we are in Him, we are accepted by God, Ephesians 1:7,8. Thus, we *"rejoice in hope,"* Romans 5:1,2; Ephesians 2:19-22.

Sacrifice is an important part of both the Old and New Testament. Though what is offered is different, offerings are required. The altar of David points to Christ. He is our sacrifice.

Ed Mathews

Now

There is no guarantee we will see tomorrow. Is not life a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes? James 4:14b. Here and gone in the blink of an eye.

We only have today. We only live now. Why procrastinate? We plan on “later” but “later” may never come!

Young people anticipate growing up. They dream of the future: marriage, a family, and retirement. When they reach their first goal, they turn to the next one. They focus on tomorrow and overlook today.

It is good to plan ahead—but not at the expense of the present. Indeed, there will come a time when we will quit looking forward. Limitations will define your life. Aches and pains will deter activity. Then what will you do? Why not live now? We do not know what will happen tomorrow, James 4:14a.

Today is the day to serve God. There is nothing more disheartening than to realize *“what could have been.”* “Could haves” and “should haves” will not win a crown. We are judged by what is done. *“He who knows the good he ought to do, and does not do it, sins,”* James 4:17.

Many were baptized during a Gospel Meeting. But one man waited. “Why?” “*Maybe later,*” he said. “*Why not now?*” “*I have a problem. I do not see how I am going to get my shirt over my wings when I get to glory!*”

“That is not your problem. Your difficulty is not later but now.” “What do you mean?” the man asked. *“Your problem is how you are going to get your hat over your horns!”*

The success of tomorrow starts today.

Ed Mathews

Forgiveness

The prophet urged Israel to “*return to God*,” Hosea 14:1a. He wanted them to turn around, to go in the opposite direction. It was not too late!

Israel was to “*take words*” with them. They were to say to God “*forgive all our sins*,” Hosea 14:2.

Lillian Fleischmann, a Wycliffe Bible translator, was frustrated. She was working among the Bine tribe of New Guinea. After years of effort, she had not discovered a word for “*forgiveness*.”

At first she tried phrases to describe a forgiven person. That did not work. In the Bine culture, only a coward forgives an offense. How was she to express God forgiving them without implying He was coward?

Then, one day, at a funeral, the chief addressed the visitors of the deceased. After mentioning the name of each visitor, he said, “*You are “kalya.”*” Lillian learned that “*kalya*” meant “*released from punishment because one was exempt from blame*.” This was the perfect term for “*forgiveness*.”

The Bine people had a word they could take to God! With “*kalya*” they could express their repentance and plead for forgiveness. Since Jesus had died for their sins, they were set free from blame (though not innocent).

Lillian was excited. At last she could express the true meaning of the Good News. The Bine people were no different than Israel, no different than us. Their sins had been their “*downfall*,” Hosea 14:1b.

But they had a word in their language they could ask for forgiveness. “*Kalya*” was the word. And the response of God would be the same: “*I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them*,” Hosea 14:4.

Ed Mathews

Peace

We are to “*seek peace and pursue it*,” I Peter 3:11. “*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*,” Romans 12:18. Peace requires forbearance—a willingness to suffer wrong. If we are to have peace, we must not begin or continue a fight.

Yet there are cantankerous people. There may come a time when one feels the need to defend his self. When you have turned the other cheek, when you have gone the second mile, legal counsel may be necessary. The words “*if it is possible*” and “*as far as it depends on you*” cover those extreme situations.

In spite of the unwillingness of others, we must live in peace, Mark 9:50; II Corinthians 13:11; I Thessalonians 5:13. God demands it. “*Blessed are the peacemakers*,” Matthew 5:9.

A young boy asked his dad how wars begin. “*They are caused by one nation invading another nation*,” he said. The mother interrupted: “*Tell your son the truth*,” she barked. “*You were not asked the question—I was?*” he shot back. The wife was insulted. She angrily stomped out of the room and slammed the door. When everything was quiet, the boy said, “*I think I understand how wars begin!*”

It takes two to start a conflict. A person cannot successfully initiate a battle unless someone fights back. It is hard to have war with those who seek peace. The secret is in “*forgiving*” and “*forgetting*.”

Where do we find our jollies? Is it in stirring up discord or is it in pursuing peace? What would Jesus approve? What will lead to tranquility?

He who fails to forgive burns the bridge of brotherhood.

Ed Mathews

No Longer Save

We are apt to think that if we had passed through the Red Sea, if we had stood at Mount Sinai, we would not have forgotten God.

Best we think again! We are no different than Israel. In spite of good intentions, we would do what they did. And, like them, unless we turn to the Lord, "*He will no longer save,*" Judges 10:13.

1. Trouble. All of us need help. Life is full of anxieties and setbacks. And, even if it is smooth sailing now, that will not last. Man is "*born to trouble,*" Job 5:7. And, when it comes, we will not be able to save ourselves.

2. Refuge. Life has its potholes. We cannot avoid all of them. Some of the bumps will leave us helpless. It is inevitable. We need a Rescuer. Money, fame, or position will be useless in our hour of need.

3. Savior. If we have not submitted to the Lord, we have no right to expect His help. To make peace with Him on our deathbed, is an insult. True . . . He will receive the honest seeker, but is terror of eternity genuine repentance?

The Lord takes a dim view of deliberate procrastination. Israel begged for help. Jehovah turned a deaf ear. He said, "*I will no longer save!*" Time had expired.

God is not a stopgap, last minute safety net. He is calling sinners now. If the wayward refuse in the present, their soul is in jeopardy in the future.

For some people, religion is merely a coat to put on when it is convenient—a coat they will not need in the next life.

Ed Mathews

Is God Dead?

Some folks say, “*God is dead!*” These pseudo-intellectuals express their sympathy, recite a funeral oration, and bury an empty casket. They eulogize the One who supposedly passed away.

The consequences of such thinking are far reaching. We do well to ponder them carefully.

1. Divine Rule. The Bible says God rules because He is alive. “*A surely as I live,*” declares the sovereign Lord, “*I will rule over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,*” Ezekiel 20:33. He is the Lord. He calls the shots. Are we paying attention?

2. Human Repentance. Jehovah said man should repent because He is alive. “*As surely as I live,*” declares the sovereign Lord, “*I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their way and live,*” Ezekiel 33:11. Does it matter? Do we care? He does!

3. Final Judgment. Because God lives, He warned of the last judgment. “*As surely as I live,*” says the Lord, “*every knee will bow*” and each one “*will give an account of himself to God,*” Romans 14:11,12. He is serious. No joke! We should be, too!

Humans find it easier to change God than to change themselves. They bury the Lord so they can do as they please. They bravely suggest that the Almighty died (though believers were not aware He was in hospice).

Saying something happened does not mean it happened. Assuming something transpired does not prove it did. Such is definitely the case in reference to the funeral of God.

He is alive. He rules. He is calling. He has set the day for judgment. Are we ready? He is!

Ed Mathews

Life Is Short

“Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting life is,” Psalm 39:4.

Elizabeth Freeman went as a missionary to India in 1851. She had just married John Freeman, a twelve-year missionary veteran in India. Mary, his first wife, had died on the mission field, a year earlier

Elizabeth had difficulty adjusting to missionary life. But she stayed the course. She wrote, *“Being a missionary is a sad disappointment unless your heart is filled with a love for God.”*

The Lord has made our days very short. The span of our years is nothing. We are but a breath, Psalm 39:5. Elizabeth was fully aware of the fleeting nature of her existence. Her days in India would be few.

The Indian Mutiny was on the horizon. Violence was erupting everywhere. Foreigners were no longer welcome. In 1858, full-scale rebellion boiled over in northern India—where Elizabeth served. The Freemans soon realized they were surrounded. Their missionary colleagues had either left or were killed.

On June 2, 1858, Elizabeth wrote her last letter home. *“I say good-bye. Pray for us. Will write soon if I live.”*

Elizabeth lived eleven more days. On June 13, at 7 AM, she and her family were marched to the town-square and shot. The Freemans were hated because they loved. Elizabeth spent less than seven years in India. But those precious years were *“lived for the glory of God.”*

“Now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in You,” Psalm 39:7.

Life is never meaningless when you are serving the Lord—regardless of what may happen.

Ed Mathews

Personal Work

The Church has lost most of her zeal for winning souls. We still want others to be saved. But we rarely engage in personal evangelism. Sadly, we have forgotten that *"he who wins souls is wise,"* Proverbs 11:30.

What is personal work?

1. It Is Evangelism. Personal work is more than a social visit. It does more than show interest. It imparts instruction. A personal worker is not a public speaker but a private instructor. He or she delivers the Good News in a home rather than from a pulpit.

2. It Is Work. A sermon is delivered in a few minutes to a large audience. It takes a lifetime to teach that many people about salvation in house meetings. Personal evangelism requires much effort. It usually occurs during the evening hours.

3. It Is Personal. Few Christians believe they are responsible to speak to others about Christ. Yet the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the first century was due to personal evangelism, Acts 8:1,4; 15:35. *"Each one win one"* is still the heartbeat of personal work.

Public worship services must not be relied upon to convert the world. Most Sunday assemblies are by design to encourage the saints. Personal evangelism is an intentional means of *"leading the lost to righteousness,"* Daniel 12:3.

Personal work is a way of bearing fruit, of being a disciple, of glorifying God, John 15:8. The Lord wishes for the Church to be an army of personal evangelists, to be fishers of men. That is what Christ was, Luke 19:10. That is who the early Christians were, Acts 11:19-21.

Like Paul, we should by *"all possible means save some,"* I Corinthians 9:22.

Ed Mathews

Faith

The queen, in the story of Alice in Wonderland, said she was one hundred and one, five months, and one day old. Alice did not believe her. So the queen told Alice to shut her eyes, take a deep breath, and believe.

This is the way many people understand religious faith. All that is required to believe is to blindly accept whatever one takes a notion to believe. But the Bible disagrees. *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,"* Hebrews 11:1.

We live in a world that requires faith. The farmer sows his seed *"in faith."* The investor invests his money *"in faith."* The sailor hoists his sails *"in faith."* Parents train their children *"in faith."* And Christians live *"by faith,"* II Corinthians 5:7.

Faith beyond all doubt is the greatest force in the world. It is the anchor we cast into an unknown sea in order to keep from sinking into despair.

The scientist is a person of faith. He believes in what he cannot always see. He works with the invisible forces of nature. Newton understood gravity by faith. Einstein based his theory of relativity on faith. The secret of the atom was discovered by faith.

The world has two parts: (1) the part that can be measured by tangible instruments, and (2) the part that is measured by faith. Confusion results when the parts are treated the same. In other words, the scientist must not use scientific measurements on religion. Nor must the believer demand that all science be biblically interpreted.

Casting your faith on the unseen makes life a most fascinating adventure.

Ed Mathews

Few Things

Those who are faithful in a *"few things"* are given greater opportunities to serve, Matthew 25:21. Operating a YMCA canteen for soldiers in France during the First World War surely qualified as a *"few things."*

J. Gresham Machen had volunteered for service overseas in 1917. At the time, he was a professor at Princeton University. He was thirty-four years old. He had no illusions of grandeur when he was assigned to operate a hot chocolate stand near the front lines.

Machen had hoped he could help the soldiers spiritually. That proved to be a "pipe dream." There were few worship services. Those that were held were poorly attended. When Machen did preach, he set aside his polished sermons and told Bible stories. It was a humbling experience for a brilliant seminary professor. And, more humbling, was his daily routine.

Machen operated his canteen out of a destroyed building. The facility was missing most of its roof. Water had soaked the premises. Rats had taken up residence. The professor made crude tables and chairs out of bomb damaged lumber. His living quarters and canteen "dining-room" were a sight for sore eyes.

Nevertheless, he organized games, served hot chocolate, and conversed with the soldiers. It seemed like a waste of his talents. But, Machen remained faithful to his *"few things."*

After the war, he returned to his post at Princeton a changed man. And he went on to write a Greek textbook that is still in use today. Plus he played a leading role in stemming the tide of theological liberalism in the 1920's. Few people know that that monumental service was significantly influenced by a hot chocolate stand.

Ed Mathews

Immigrants

Immigrants are found everywhere in the world. They leave their native country in order to settle in another land. War, overcrowding, disease, and oppression are the main causes of their wandering. They hope to find a new life.

There is something exciting about going to a new place, going where we have never been. The urge to emigrate springs from dissatisfaction. It is energized by the hope of finding a better situation.

Abraham and Sarah were immigrants, Hebrews 11:13. Likewise, we are “*aliens and strangers*” in this world, I Peter 2:11. As spiritual emigrants, our citizenship is above.

The farther we journey and the older we become, the more we realize we are simply pilgrims. We are just passing through. We are out of step with those around us. We do not fit in with the crowd. Our joy is somewhere else.

We are sickened by the pleasures of society: the conversation is gross, the music is nauseating, the entertainment is disgusting. It is obvious we do not belong here.

How sweet, how refreshing is the fellowship of the other immigrants headed to the new heaven and new earth. With them, we feel a warm kinship. It can only get better once we arrive in the “Promised Land.”

God has something unique for us. For now, in the church, “*we are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household*,” Ephesians 2:19. It is a welcome respite.

We are here temporarily. We are citizens of His kingdom, ambassadors of the King. We are strangers in this world, immigrants on our way to a better place. Our home is above.

Ed Mathews

Grace Of Giving

Our Sunday contribution should be immersed in a weekday commitment. It must be motivated by delight rather than duty. Our focus should be on pleasing God instead of the obeying man. The saints should want to give instead of feel like they have to give.

1. Focus On God. We give in order to serve the Lord. Whatever we do, our stewardship must honor Him. Willing devotion speaks louder than grudging submission. The heart determines the generosity of the purse, II Corinthians 9:5.
2. Honor The Master. There is often a wide gap between what He wants and what the church wishes. Our giving should honor Him rather than balance a budget. Our contribution should praise the Lord rather than satisfy the finance committee.
3. Satisfy Kingdom Needs. We create budgets but must not be slaves to them. The will of God must trump human proposals. Professional fund raising tactics are forbidden. Joyful generosity must replace dutiful compulsion, II Corinthians 9:7.
4. Grow In Grace. Spiritual development must replace monetary goals. Jesus asked us to deny ourselves. That denial is far more than monetary restraint. The Lord wants us. And, if He gets us, He will get our wallets, II Corinthians 8:7.

Our Sunday morning contribution has several implications. It acknowledges the goodness of heaven. It fulfills needs on earth. It signals a desire to be gracious like God. It is a terrestrial gesture with celestial significance. Passing the collection plate is worship on many levels. Lets us participate with a full understanding.

Giving is not for the glory of the church but for the veneration of God.

Ed Mathews

Overlooked

You probably have never heard of Harriet Winslow. She was a missionary in India in the early 1800's. Because she could not read and write, there is almost no record of her work.

Though Harriet served on foreign soil three or four times longer than her co-workers, she was overlooked. A fellow missionary said she never grew "*weary of doing good*," Galatians 6:9. In short, Harriet Winslow was a secret servant.

Her early years were spent in rural America. She had no opportunity to go to school. Yet she learned Bible stories. Harriet could repeat most of the Bible by memory before her eighteenth birthday. When she volunteered to go overseas, her home congregation gladly sent her.

On the field, she learned the local language quickly. Her linguistic skills were known far and wide. Harriet gathered kids to tell them Bible stories long before her teammates could hold a simple conversation. Her illiteracy at home did not hinder her service abroad.

Harriet Winslow was always busy. Her fellow missionaries could not keep up with her. She brought more people to Christ than the six other missionaries on her team combined. Several times during her sixty-two years in India, her co-workers wrote to her supporters to "bring her home." To their credit, her supporters ignored the complainers.

Harriet is buried overseas—in the soil of her adopted country. She loved the people. The people loved her. Literally, thousands of Indians found Jesus because a simple, illiterate country girl told them Bible stories. If she was handicapped, she did not seem to notice. If she was snubbed, she did not appear offended.

She simply did what she could!

Ed Mathews

Listening

We hear another sermon every Sunday. It is easy to become deaf. Why?

1. We Have Sin In Our Life. We do not want to hear. We are comfortable the way we are. We have hung a DO NOT DISTURB sign. We wish to be left alone.

2. We Have Not Made Preparation. We have given careful thought to our wardrobe but have given little attention to our soul. We come as we are hoping the service will not challenge us to be different.

3. We Think We Are Safe. What more do we need to do? We have been baptized. We attend. We participate in worship. Is that not enough?

It is interesting to notice that there are 20 passages wanting God to hear us for every verse God wishes we would hear Him! What does this say? We are more concerned about the Lord attending to our needs than we are concerned about hearing His solutions?

Though a sermon may seem drab, there will always be something worth hearing. It may be a short phrase or a single sentence. It is transforming to you (though it may not be heard by others).

Everyone must tune in to the whole discourse lest they miss the part where heaven breaks through. That gem can bring conviction, hope, and strength. It is there among the many words like a nugget of gold in a mountain of gravel.

From now on, pan for the truth like a miner looking for the prize. Practice paying attention! Pray that God will help you "listen," Psalms 85:8a.

A bad listener rarely hears a good sermon.

Ed Mathews

Work

Work is an effort directed toward the accomplishment of something. It is what a person does, makes or performs as part of his or her occupation or task. But, it becomes drudgery, if it is viewed that way.

- . Nothing is work unless you would rather do something else.
- . If work is fun, it is no longer work.
- . Choose a job you love and you will never work a day in our life.
- . The secret to enjoying work is doing a good job.
- . Joy on the job is never the money you get from loathing the work you do.
- . Anyone can do anything as long as he or she enjoys it.
- . Some people work like it is killing them—and it probably is.
- . If you have a job without aggravations you likely do not have a job.
- . The reward for toil is not what we get from it but what we become by it.
- . Work is what you do—while your feelings about it, is what you are.

“A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work,” Ecclesiastes 2:24. “. . . there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work because that is his lot,” Ecclesiastes 3:22. When we are happy in our work, it is “a gift of God,” Ecclesiastes 5:19.

Dare we refuse that gift!

Ed Mathews

The Bible

The Bible is the greatest book in the world. It tells us who we are and where we are going. It informs us how to live and how to die. It is a road map for human existence.

So far most everyone agrees. But do those words apply to you? And what do they mean to me? There is one way of answering those questions—by asking some additional questions. The process may be tedious but the answers are beneficial.

The Scriptures say, “*Love your enemies*,” Matthew 5:44. Do we? The Bible says, “*Be kind to each other*,” I Thessalonians 5:15. Are we? The inspired word tells us to “*avoid every kind of evil*,” I Thessalonians 5:22. We could go on indefinitely, but the point is clear. The question behind these questions is: “*What effect does the Bible have on us?*”

People are not reading the word like they used to. Why? Does that mean we do not care as much as we did? Does it mean we have put other things ahead of regularly reading the Book of books? Whatever the reason, the outcome is the same. We are starving. God is disappointed. The truth is neglected.

The Lord demanded that we respect His word. He made that perfectly clear to:

Moses, Deuteronomy 4:2
 Joshua, Joshua 1:7
 Solomon, Proverbs 30:5,6
 Paul, Galatians 1:8,9
 John, Revelation 22:18,19

And He made it absolutely clear to us, too, Psalm 19:7-11; II Timothy 3:16,17. Let us not ignore His precious word, cf. Hebrews 2:2-4. Let us not add to or take from His message.

It is well we master the word. It is better if the word masters us!

Ed Mathews

Sent

The mission field is usually thought to be in another country. But it can be wherever people need the Good News. Margaret Clarkson found this to be true.

Margaret was born in Ontario, Canada in 1915. She was physically handicapped. She persevered—became a certified teacher. Jobs were scarce. So she accepted a position 1400 miles away in a sawmill town. Later she moved to a mining village. In all, she spent seven years in the northern wilderness.

During those years, she experienced extreme loneliness. The most trying was the spiritual privation. She never met another Christian in all of her years on the frontier.

No church would send her as a missionary (though she ended up on a mission field). This brave woman was truly a messenger of God. The words of Jesus became her song: *“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you,”* [John 20:21](#).

Margaret was in her twenties. She longed for companionship. There were no eligible prospects among the lumberjacks and miners. She often expressed her feelings in poetry. So one night she wrote a poem that became a well-known missionary hymn: “So Send I You.”

So send I you to labor unrewarded,
To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown
To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing
So send I you to toil for Me alone.

Margaret later regretted that her words were so negative. They reflect the hardships but not the happiness of mission work. In 1963, she added more verses.

The effect of her words was profound. They challenged many to rethink their choice of vocation. Thanks Margaret!

Life is like tennis: Those who serve well seldom lose.

Ed Mathews

Lickins With Love

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it,” Proverbs 22:6. A proven but often neglected promise. Children need discipline. *“The rod of correction imparts wisdom. But a child left to himself will disgrace his mother,”* Proverbs 29:15; cf. Proverbs 29:17. In other words, pampered kids will bring much grief to their parents.

Every youngster needs a balanced diet of “lickins and love.” Discipline without compassion hardens. Love without punishment distorts. Children need both in appropriate proportions.

Fathers and mothers prefer to be pals. They often lack the backbone to be parents. But, without boundaries, kids grow up to be social misfits, unprepared to live in an adult world.

Balance is the key. The “love” should be as obvious as the “lickin.” Otherwise, the child is confused. When the harshness outweighs the tenderness, youngsters become rebellious. The straight jacket of “rules and restrictions” can be laced too tight.

No doubt, all grownups remember the words: *“This hurts me more than it hurts you.”* And, as kids, we remember thinking: *“How could that be?”* At the time, the “lickin” hurt so bad, the “love” was hidden. But, eventually, the kindness breaks through.

Yes, dad had his “medicine kit.” It cured the disease of disobedience. That “kit” stopped me many times from stepping over the line. I did not want to disappoint him. I knew he loved me. But I also knew there were limits. He had a formula. He carefully applied the medicine. I was blessed by his *“lickins and love.”*

Juvenile delinquency is the result of parents failing to start at the bottom.

Ed Mathews

Fifth Gospel

A recent convert said, “*I was brought to Christ by the fifth Gospel.*” It was not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John but the Gospel according to Jake.

Jake was a handy man. He repaired houses for the needy. The Lord used this gentle servant to save others. Jake was the Good News in action.

There are thousands who never go to church. Yet they see the Gospel through men and women like Jake the handy man.

Paul said to the Corinthians that they were “*his letter . . . known and read by everybody,*” II Corinthians 3:2. We may be the fifth Gospel to a neighbor or friend. What is our message? Do they see Jesus in us?

We need to be sure our testimony is clear, bold, and readable. This requires pure behavior, a steady walk, an attractive attitude, and fairness in all our dealings. Above all, it requires “*being ready at all times to give a reason for the hope that is in us with gentleness and respect,*” I Peter 3:15.

The Bible is seldom read by those who need to read it. Yet the world constantly “reads” us! Are we an accurate, encouraging, consistent communication of the message of God?

We are the Good News!
Let us be right and true.
The only Gospel some will read,
Is the Gospel according to you!

They were sinners. They had little respect for others. But a new employee—kind and good—caught their attention. The atmosphere changed. Light overcame darkness. The Good News was seen. The fifth Gospel spoke loud and clear—without says a word!

Those who ignore the Bible will read “living letters.”

Ed Mathews

Shadows

In the 23rd Psalm, David mentioned “*the valley of the shadow of death*,” Psalm 23:4. He did not say he was walking “to” the valley or walking “by” the valley. He said he was walking “through” the valley. The “*valley of the shadow of death*” was the grave, Job 3:3-5; 10:20,21.

For the child of God, our tomb is not end. Instead, it is a temporary station where we leave behind the heavy freight of mortality and board the fiery chariot bound for heaven.

A shadow is harmless. We need not shrink back in fear. The shadow of a dog does not bite. Shadows are copies of objects blocking the light behind them. They are merely silhouettes or images of reality.

Shadows are not possible unless there is light. The Light of God casts the “shadow of death” across the valley of life, cf. John 1:4,5. It is the same light that waits to welcome us home. Our funeral is simply a quick stop on the way to the throne of glory.

An elderly saint was gripped in fear. *“I am dying but I cannot remember any of the promises. For years I have rejoiced in the assurances of God. But those guarantees have left me. I am scared. What should I do?”*

“Do you think the Lord will forget His promises?” “Oh, no, He will remember” the dying disciple replied. *“I am sure He will keep them all.”*

And, with a confident smile, the struggle was over. The child of God passed through the shadow of death—the likeness of sleep—into the embrace of the Almighty.

The light is real. Our death is only a mirage.

Ed Mathews

Cheer

The mark of a Christian is happiness. There is much about which to be cheerful. No situation is so bad that it is beyond God fixing. Certainly what your mind possesses your face expresses, Proverbs 15:13a.

We are encouraged to be happy. Three times during His ministry, Jesus said, "*Be of good cheer.*" The first time was when He spoke to a lame man, Matthew 9:2. The Lord forgave his sins. The second time was when the disciples were perishing in a storm. Christ simply said, "*It is I,*" Mark 6:50b. And, the third time He bid His followers to be happy, when they were headed for trouble, John 16:33.

How interesting! We are to trust Him when we are sick. We are to be of good cheer when tossed about in the storms of life. And, we are not to be troubled when we are in trouble. Why? Well, in each case, Jesus is there.

Cheerfulness comes from the inside. It stems from a mindset. It is the product of a disposition firmly fixed on the grace of God. Ask great things of Him. Expect great things from Him.

There are lots of people who spend so much time feeling miserable that they have little time to be happy. But "*a cheerful heart is a continual feast,*" Proverbs 15:15b. It is "*good medicine,*" Proverbs 17:22a. Cheerfulness has the power to endure and the strength to achieve. The secret to happiness is not to mourn the past or worry about the future. The secret is to live in the present with God.

The Lord wants us to be happy. What do we want?

Ed Mathews

Innocent

Pilot believed that Jesus was innocent, Luke 23:4. Three times he appealed to the crowd to release Him, Luke 23:22. But, in the end, he surrendered to their demands, Luke 23:24.

In the centuries since that bogus trial, Christians have stood before crowds not knowing what their fate might be. Many were falsely accused and unjustly sentenced because the facts were ignored.

That was the predicament of Annie Bernstein. She was a nurse serving in China. She was a messenger of goodwill to the remote villages of Shensi Province.

The army of Mao Tse Tung took over Shensi Province in 1948. Annie was captured. The communist officials ordered a public trial. They already determined that Annie was guilty. Each family in the area was ordered to send a representative to serve on the jury. The tribal chief presided over the proceedings.

On the appointed day, six thousand people assembled. The trial was rigged. Annie was called a traitor. The outcome was supposed to display the power of the communist insurgents.

With hands tightly bound, Annie faced the crowd. She was calm and composed. Annie looked at the chief. The petite missionary had saved his daughter from a deadly disease. With halting words, the chief asked, *"Who accuses this woman?"* No one responded. For nine minutes there was complete silence. The communists ordered the crowd to condemn her. No one did.

Finally, the chief spoke. *"None of us want to attack our missionary. She has done nothing wrong. She has saved many of our lives. And she asked nothing in return."*

If we were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

Ed Mathews

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